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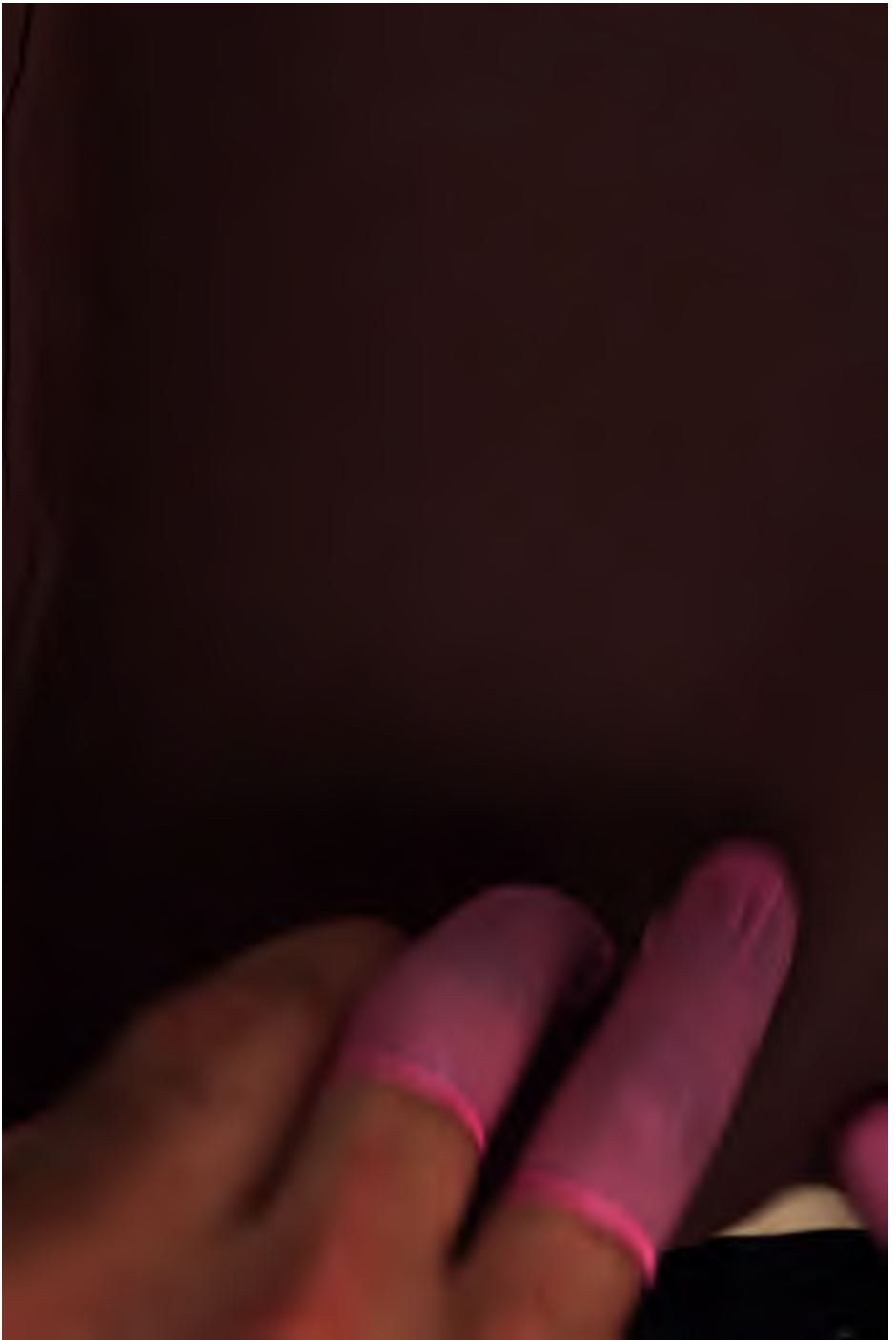
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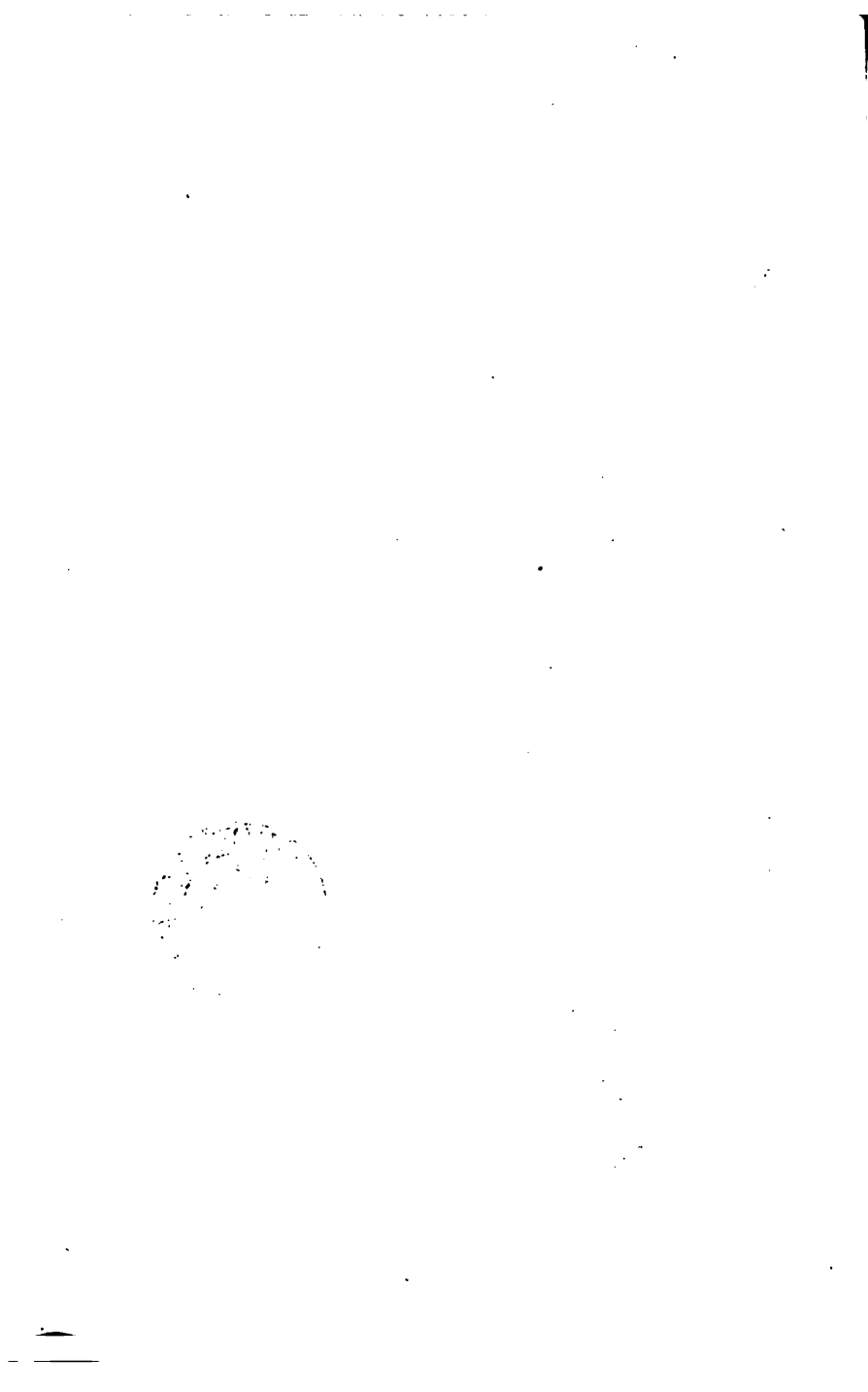
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A CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE:

A Novel,

FOUNDED ON FACT.

By MRS. DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "THE TWO CATHERINES," "SAVILE HOUSE," "THE
ARTIST'S FAMILY," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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A CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE.

CHAPTER I.

IS HE THE HERO?

It was the height of the season; gigantic old London wore its brightest and most animated aspect: and what city in the world can surpass it during the months of May and June? Paris may have its bluer sky and more ethereal atmosphere, its more regular streets and better-placed public buildings; its Bois de Boulogne, forest of Vincennes, and Parc de Monceaux, all kept in trim order, watered, and swept to perfection; but it wants the

countless numbers of human beings and splendid equipages that overspread the streets of London, making the latter, notwithstanding its begrimed and reeky appearance, the wonder, if not the admiration, of the world. It is not intended to draw a parallel between these two great cities. Each is unequalled in its way; each has its speciality; and each might, with advantage to itself, imitate and adopt the good that prevails in its rival, and avoid the nuisances which impair enjoyment.

June had just commenced; the sky was cloudless, and the weather glorious. In the working parts of the town the thoroughfares were crowded. Men hurried to and fro, on the business of their daily life, quite heedless of each other, as if their very existence depended upon the act on which they were at the moment engaged. Trade was brisk, and labour well supplied with work. Even poverty crept out from its dark corners and recesses to bask in the sunshine, with as much content as the most slothful lazzarone in Naples.

At the West-end the shops were gorgeously decked out in their summer array. Every imaginable colour and conceivable texture dazzled or delighted the eyes of passengers, tempting them to expend their money to their hearts' content, or to satisfy their ambitious fancy. Each shop-keeper tried to outvie his neighbour by offering to gaping multitudes all that was bright, beautiful, and attractive. Loungers, idlers, and pleasure-seekers thronged the pavements; carriages of every form and fashion dashed along with such rapidity as to render it dangerous for foot-passengers to cross the streets.

Amidst the surging mass of changing faces there was one that merited and obtained more than a casual glance from the passers-by. It was proud and dignified, yet expressive; it seemed to say, "You may eat and be merry with me, laugh and weep with me, jest and be sarcastic, friendly and inimical; and yet you shall not know the tenor of my thoughts, the significance of my smile, or the spirit of my remark." The owner

of that face was Raoul St. Pierre. He lounged lazily along down Regent Street into the Haymarket. The gay shops had no attraction for him; he never stopped even to give a passing glance at the tempting wares, but kept on his way steadily, until he reached Garrard's. Here he entered, and requested to see their most *recherché* jewellery. He was evidently a connoisseur, from the way in which he handled and remarked upon the different articles placed before him. He was difficult to please; tray after tray was inspected; at last his fancy was attracted by a ring fashioned after the antique. It was in the form of a serpent, curiously chased and twisted in numerous coils, in every one of which were inserted gems of rare description; its jewelled head seemed actually to have a living expression in it. This, as has been said, attracted the gentleman's attention. He examined the ring attentively, inquired its price, bought it, paid for it, and sauntered slowly from the shop, wending his way thoughtfully along, unattracted by, and uninterested in, the

various phases of life that filled the streets of London with ever-changing and living mystery. Having arrived at the Travellers' Club, in Pall Mall, he went up the steps, entered the hall, and inquired for letters. Upon receiving some, he entered the morning-room. Immediately upon his entrance he was greeted by some of his acquaintances, who were lounging upon luxurious couches, occupying themselves in skimming over the papers, and in the usual idle, do-nothing fashion of London club-life. He had a courteous word or significant smile for every one who addressed him.

Having seated himself at a table already occupied by one of his more intimate friends, he threw his letters on the table, exclaiming, in a foreign accent—

"It's a pity one can't live without receiving or writing letters!"

"You seem, at any rate, to be especially favoured," replied his friend, glancing at the superscription of the letters. "By Jove, St. Pierre, I'd

give something to know who is your fair correspondent !”

“ Fair ! humph !” answered St. Pierre. “ Why do you suppose that my correspondent is fair ?”

“ Well, that is a mere guess, I admit ; but a guess on good grounds. Why, it is but three days since you were last here, and, lo ! I do believe there are half a dozen letters to greet you ; and all in the same handwriting, too. Now I know but two sorts of people likely to persecute a man with such pertinacity ; and those are—duns and women.”

“ Women ! pshaw ! your head always runs on women.”

“ My heart will never run away with my head, though. There is a sad case yonder,” added the speaker, lowering his voice : “ Metcalfe has——”

“ What’s that about me ?” said a young man, throwing down the *Saturday Review*, which had seemed to occupy all his attention.

“ Oh ! nothing,” was the reply : “ I was only going to remark——”

"That I had made a fool of myself, I suppose," returned Metcalfe, glumly; "and your remark would have been quite right. I admit I have."

"I would not like to hear your enemy say so," said M. St. Pierre, courteously; "one act of folly by no means proves that the actor is a fool."

"In my case it is proof positive," replied Metcalfe. "The fact is—I see Henderson is dying to tell you—I have proposed this morning, and have been rejected."

St. Pierre looked at him, inquiringly, and said, "Well, that was not wise, certainly."

"What was not wise," inquired Metcalfe, jealously—"the proposal or the rejection?"

"Oh! I would not presume to pass censure on a lady," said St. Pierre; "but a man should never propose until he is sure of being accepted."

"But I was sure," said Metcalfe, ruefully. "Miss Vernon always——"

"Miss Vernon!" exclaimed St. Pierre, fairly

starting with amazement. "You don't mean to say—you never presumed——"

"Presumed! why not? I see no presumption in a man of my position proposing to a girl like that."

"I should think it presumption in any man aspiring to the hand of Miss Vernon."

"I don't know about that. I admit she is a girl who would do honour to any man's choice, or I should not have made her mine. She is young, rich——"

"Enough to buy you a seat in Parliament," interrupted Henderson, by way of parenthesis.

"Of course," returned Metcalfe. "I couldn't afford to marry any woman, not even Venus, with all her charms——"

"Except they were golden ones," added his tormentor. "I never gave you credit for over-modesty; but I must say you made a bold stroke when you tried to pocket such a golden ball."

"I don't know that; for, although I have a great respect, intense affection, and all that sort of

thing for her, yet I have also a proper respect—I mean, I set a proper value on myself.”

“My good fellow!” said Henderson, slapping him heartily on the back, “you will have to go at half your price. What do you say, St. Pierre?”

“Well,” answered St. Pierre, smiling sarcastically, “I am afraid, if we were all bought at our own price, and sold at our neighbour’s valuation, there would be great fluctuations in the market.”

“I don’t understand your logic,” answered Metcalfe, doggedly; “however, in my case, I maintain, it would be a fair bargain on both sides. I want money—Miss Vernon wants rank and position.”

“Indeed!” returned St. Pierre. “I never knew that Miss Vernon had sought either.”

“You quibble at words,” replied Metcalfe, testily. “I didn’t say she had sought them; but all girls aspire to that sort of thing, you know. After all, when a woman has money, in what better way could she invest it than in the purchase of

family dignity and honour? For you must remember that Miss Vernon is but a trader's daughter, and I am heir to a baronetcy, and can make her Lady Metcalfe. I told her so; and she positively laughed in my face—atrociously ill-bred, to say the least of it! Don't you think so?" saying which the speaker turned away, twisting his moustache in extreme disgust.

"It may be bad taste," said M. St. Pierre, "but you see that even the stream of family dignity and honour, filtered through a long line of ancestors, may become so weakened by time, or so impregnated with the weeds and refuse of succeeding generations, that even a trader's daughter may refuse to be connected with it."

"You are satirical," exclaimed Metcalfe; "we shall never agree upon these matters: French and English never do, I know. Since your grand revolution, you Frenchmen have lost your respect for ancient nobility. Everything new and gaudy is the rage with you. I believe you prefer modern brass to antique gold."

"I do not think a Frenchman would do that any more than an Englishman," replied St. Pierre; "though I admit the one is much more plentiful than the other in this country, as well as in my own. I have, however, a great respect for true nobility; but there must be no sham about it. If a noble name were synonymous with a noble spirit and incorruptible honour, I would be the first to bow down and do homage to it; but as it is too often like a jewelled handle to a blunt and worthless blade, I despise it."

"Then you despise all I have been taught to respect," said Metcalfe, sulkily.

"No," replied St. Pierre; "I despise the false, and admire the true. I acknowledge that it is a good thing to be well born; but I think it is better to act nobly than to be born great; for birth is a mere accident, which we owe to our parents. Our actions, the real fruit of our lives, we owe to ourselves."

"Bravo!" said Henderson; "that is a true English feeling; and I could not have expressed

it better myself. There is no use in Metcalfe standing up against you, for you are sure to floor him by straightforward hits. Whenever you aim, you are sure to hit your mark."

"But you know," said St. Pierre, laughing, "they say an Englishman is never beaten—not even when he is down; he will rise to the attack again and again, and he is sure to conquer at last. It is that spirit, which you call pluck, that has made England what she is; won for her, her colonies, trumpeted her name in desert places, and peopled distant lands with her children, who have fought with and overcome difficulties which, but for that steady spirit of perseverance which characterizes the nation, would have remained insurmountable for ever. But I see Metcalfe is mustering his forces, and I had better begone; for if we engage in a war of wits, I am sure to be worsted." So saying, the Frenchman gathered up his letters, nodded familiarly to his friends, and left the room.

"What a conceited ass that Frenchman is!"

growled Metcalfe, as the door closed upon St. Pierre. "I wish you wouldn't talk of my affairs to him—he is the last person I should choose as the depositary of my secret."

"Secret!" exclaimed Henderson; "my dear fellow, you don't suppose that the fact of your handsome proposal to Miss Vernon can be kept a secret?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, she will be so proud of the honour that she will publish it all over London before sunset. It is not every girl that has a chance of refusing a baronet in embryo."

"What a confounded fool I've been!" muttered Metcalfe, gloomily. "If I hadn't thought she liked me——"

"Never mind," said his buoyant friend; "you'll learn to read love's symptoms better. You'll succeed next time."

"Egad!" replied Metcalfe, brightening, "the next time the girl shall propose to me."

"Bravo! stick to that resolution, my friend,

and I shall envy you the future Lady Metcalfe. For the present, suppose we have a game at *écarté*; it's a capital thing to drive away the blues."

St. Pierre, meanwhile, made his way rapidly down Piccadilly towards Rotten Row. Arrived there, he sauntered slowly up and down, now pausing to lean over the barriers, whilst he sent a searching glance among the fair riders, as though he were looking for some one in particular. Time passed on, and still he watched; presently his patience was rewarded. A lady, mounted on a splendid bay mare, entered the Row. The perfect symmetry and graceful caracoles of the creature, as well as the skilful management of its rider, attracted general admiration. The lady seemed proud of the beauty of her horse, and of her own power over it; she made it go through sundry playful evolutions, and, whether it reared or pranced from side to side, as though it danced to music, she sat erect and immovable, as if she formed part and parcel of the creature's self.

As she approached the spot where stood M. St. Pierre, the Frenchman raised his hat. The fair equestrian observed the salute, and cantered gently towards him, then drew the rein, and in a second the high-spirited horse stood still and motionless alongside the barrier.

"Ah! M. St. Pierre," said the lady, "I hardly know whether I ought to speak to you or not; for you have behaved very ill."

"I should be sorry," he answered, "if I thought I deserved so grave an accusation, especially from you."

"From me especially you deserve it most. We are afraid we must have given you some cause of offence, for you have been so chary of your visits lately."

"I have but obeyed my instincts," answered St. Pierre, looking up at her with an expression that covered her face with blushes. "Self-preservation, you know, is the first law of nature; and, in your house, Miss Vernon, I am exposed to a danger that I am anxious to avoid."

"That is cowardly," replied the lady; "a brave man would rather face a hundred dangers than ignobly fly from one. However, we shall see you to-night, at least? You know it is my birthday; and our party will lose half its attractions if the friends I value most are absent."

Thus saying she bowed gracefully, and rode gently on.

CHAPTER II.

TO DUST AND ASHES.

MAUDE VERNON returned home radiant and flushed with excitement. Springing lightly from her horse as none but an experienced horsewoman can do, she entered the house. Here she encountered a stout elderly gentleman who was just leaving it. He was dressed with consummate neatness and precision, and had a bright, intelligent face, and a smile that would reach the heart of a client, even when he had lost his cause. This gentleman was Mrs. Elmore's solicitor, a quaint and honest lawyer of the old school, possessing less brilliant powers, but perhaps more honesty, than many of his profession. Of his practice in business, it may

be said that he would never undertake a case unless he had good reason to believe he should gain it; nor could anything induce him to devote his energies to prove that wrong was right, or right was wrong. It was no wonder therefore that many of his younger, and perhaps less scrupulous, brethren had gained wealth, and were gliding gaily on the broad, bright ocean of life, while he was still struggling in the stream, or rather floating patiently on the sluggish river of endurance, trusting more to accident than design, and making a virtue of necessity. When fate drifted him into his own quiet home in the Middle Temple, where his one faithful, solitary clerk—almost as old as himself—waited to welcome him and take from his pockets any papers he had placed there, he was content and happy; the bustle and turmoil of life were forgotten in his easy-chair and comfortable slippers. Mr. Chester—for that was his name—envied no man either his popularity or his wealth. He had quite enough private, or rather family business, to

engross his time without overtaxing his brain; and whenever any difficult or knotty point arose, he always trusted to the sagacity of a leading counsel rather than to his own ingeniousness. He contented himself with watching over the interests of those who trusted their affairs to him with earnest and parental care.

Mr. Chester had been for years the trusted friend and legal adviser of Mrs. Elmore and her family. He greeted Maude Vernon with the familiarity of an old friend; for he had known her many years—indeed, from her first entrance into Mrs. Elmore's house as a lonely orphan.

"I need scarcely ask you how you have enjoyed your ride," he said, taking her hand affectionately, "for you are looking as bright as a butterfly, and as blooming as a rose."

"And what business has an old gentleman like you to be gadding about with butterflies or hovering among roses at this hour of the day?" she asked, saucily.

"Well, my dear," he replied, with quaint gravity, "I must own my business lies more with spiders and cockroaches than with butterflies and flowers. These last are more in Arnold's way."

"Arnold!" exclaimed Maude, catching at the name. "Is anything wrong with him?"

"With Arnold! Oh, no. The boy is well enough, I believe; sucking in wisdom by the gallon. Egad! he seems to be draining the fount of knowledge dry. He will be returning home with double-distilled honours."

"I hope so," returned Maude, "for his mother's sake. She expects great things from him."

"For his mother's sake!" repeated Mr. Chester. "Child, child, what hypocrites you women are! But you needn't blush."

Maude blushed deeper still as Mr. Chester's eye caught hers, and then indignantly denied that she had blushed at all. Mr. Chester exhibited an anxiety to be gone, but she tried to coax him upstairs, saying—

"Do come back : I want to have a chat with you ; besides, I wish you to see the gorgeous preparations I have made for your especial pleasure and entertainment."

"My dear girl," he replied, "the snail would willingly leave his shell and come to the butterflies' ball, but necessity forbids it."

"Why?"

"I am going to Paris."

"To Paris ! What ! to-night?"

"Not exactly to-night, but early to-morrow ; and I have many matters to arrange before I start."

"Shall you be long away?" inquired Maude.

"I hope not. I shall despatch my business and return as soon as possible."

"That's right," said Maude ; "I always like my friends to be within hail, in case of accidents. Go, and joy go with you."

"I would rather bring that back than take it," replied Mr. Chester, gravely.

"Then I know on what business you are going,"

returned Maude. "Mrs. Elmore has had another of her worrying letters, and—but there, don't be afraid, I am not going to ask you any prying questions; for I know a lawyer's secret is a sacred thing. If you really are in a hurry, I won't detain you. So good-bye, *au revoir*."

Maude tripped lightly up the stairs, and went direct to Mrs. Elmore's room. There, on a low-cushioned chair, sat an elderly lady, beyond the prime of life, with a grave, thoughtful face. She was dressed in deep mourning and wore a widow's weeds, that touching emblem of woman's loneliness and sorrow. Maude threw off her hat with the air of a spoilt child, and complained of the heat of the sun.

"I am afraid you ride too fast and too long," said Mrs. Elmore, smoothing back the hair from the young girl's forehead and kissing her with motherly affection; "then you get tired and overheated. I shall be glad when Arnold comes home; for I don't like your riding so much alone."

"I don't mind it in the least; indeed, I rather

like it, auntie; for you know I am never really alone."

"Never alone!" repeated Mrs. Elmore, surprised.

"No," said Maude, laughing at the gravity of Mrs. Elmore's face. "You know I have always the companionship of my own thoughts; and you have no idea how pleasant they can make themselves. They never scold, never upbraid me; they are my most obedient slaves, and wander hither and thither wherever I will. Sometimes they soar aloft to the clouds and bring me back a bit of the bright sunshine that hovers above this dull, matter-of-fact world, making its darkest spots glow with the colours of a rainbow."

"It is the blessed privilege of youth, darling, to seek and find in imagination the things that cold reality denies. As we grow older we have less power to direct, and still less to control, our thoughts. Then it is that they rule us; and too often they drag the unwilling spirit down into those dreary depths where Memory buries

her dead. No sunshine is there—nothing but a dead past rising up in mockery against the living present.”

“Why, dearest auntie,” affectionately asked Maude, “do you always go groping in the dark holes and corners of the past, renovating your old griefs till they look like new, and probing your old wounds till they bleed afresh?”

“My child, you talk lightly,” said Mrs. Elmore. “But how should it be otherwise? As yet no shadow has fallen on your life.”

“Has there not!” exclaimed Maude, and there was a sudden curl of her lip and flashing of her eyes as she spoke. “How little do we all know of each other’s lives! Indeed, I think I may say we live many lives in one. The world has but a passing glimpse of that which boils and bubbles at the surface, exhausting itself in daily duties, toils, or pleasures. Of the hidden depths it knows nothing. Even those who love us best cannot see where the shadow falls, nor know how dark may be the shade it casts. Young as I am,

dear auntie, I have lived long enough to know that, day by day, and hour by hour, time kills some hope, or steals some bloom away from all of us. But what of that? Hope is like the fabled hydra: when one expectation is destroyed, another springs up to take its place. Hope, too, is like a fighting army, always moving, often under fire; ever meeting with defeats, but still struggling on. What a glorious, exciting life is that of the soldier!" burst out Maude, not troubling herself about the connection or relevancy of her speech. "Sound trumpets, beat drums, and on we march!" She pretended to shoulder arms, and paced up and down the room with military precision. Mrs. Elmore looked surprised, but could not help smiling.

"Why, Maude," she said, "what wild, ungovernable spirits you have! One moment you are as sensible as I could wish you to be, the next you launch out about 'living many lives in one,' 'hidden depths,' and armies, till you quite confuse yourself and me too."

"Do I? Well, never mind. Remember, Time

is running away with my wild spirits as fast as he can. Why, they're nearly gone already! Ah! Time is a ruthless monster; he treats us all alike, carrying off our blooming present, farther and farther away, till it is swallowed up by the greedy past. Think of the flowers that are blooming, the hopes that are budding for to-night! Light hearts and smiling faces, pattering feet and pleasant music, will surround us; to-morrow all will be different: the house will be still, the flowers faded, and perhaps many radiant hopes blighted. Who can tell? So will it always be; the future we long for must become a portion of the past which we regret."

"My dear Maude, as yet you are young."

"Granted," replied Maude: "I have the longer to live, and perhaps the more to suffer; but I never think of that, dear auntie. I intend to enjoy the present, and I have hopeful faith in the future. If *you* would only look forward, instead of turning for ever to the past, mourning that which can never return——"

"How can I look forward? I have nothing to look forward to," interrupted Mrs. Elmore.

"What would Arnold say if he heard you make such a speech as that?" replied Maude, reproachfully. "Think how good and noble and devoted he is; so highly gifted, and so studious too! Why, such a son ought to be—and you know he is—the pride and glory of your life!"

Mrs. Elmore's face cleared and brightened, at hearing Maude speak so warmly of her absent son.

"You are right," she said; "and I am ungrateful to repine while I am blessed with so dear a boy. It does my heart good to hear you speak of him, Maude;" and as she spoke Mrs. Elmore took the young girl's hand and looked with inquiring tenderness in her face. "You so rarely mention him now, darling, I feared you were fast forgetting him."

"Though I may not have spoken of him," said Maude, with a conscious blush, "I have often thought of him; as to forgetting him, you know I never could do that."

"I wish he could be here to-night," said Mrs. Elmore. "This is the first time he has ever failed to spend your birthday with you; but I suppose it cannot be helped."

"No," said Maude, quietly. "Of course I shall miss him. But, as he is working so hard for honours, I think it would be a pity for him to suspend his labours even for a day."

"Well, never mind, he will soon be home for good; and you will have no more solitary rides then, Maude, love. I fancy you will desert that everlasting Row, and go riding along the pleasant lanes out of town."

"Oh, I like the Row," answered Maude; "it is a pleasant kind of resort, where we are sure to meet every one we know; besides, I like to look at the horses, and at times laugh at the riding, which is often deliciously shocking."

"Did you meet any one you knew this morning?" asked Mrs. Elmore.

"Oh, yes: there were the two Miss Foresters, and Adelaide Stanley, with her gawky brother

from Eton, and Colonel Markland, who looked as handsome and conceited as ever. And, oh!" she added, as though it had only just recurred to her, "I forgot: there was your casual acquaintance—M. St. Pierre."

"M. St. Pierre!" echoed Mrs. Elmore, quickly looking up. "I thought and hoped he had left London. He has not called here lately."

"And I rebuked him for his negligence," said Maude; "and," she added, hastily, as though she wished to get to the end of her sentence, "he has promised to come to-night to make his peace with you."

"With me! I am sorry for it—heartily sorry," exclaimed Mrs. Elmore. "Why did you ask him, Maude? You must have done so, because he had written to be excused; and I must say I think it was very unwomanly and improper of you to renew your invitation."

"If I had thought it either unwomanly or indelicate," returned Maude, proudly, "I should not have asked him; in fact, I did not exactly ask him."

"Then how do you know he is coming?"

"Because, when I reproached him for having deserted us, he seemed pained at such a charge, and I knew he would come and make his peace; and I said I should be very glad to see him; and so I shall."

"*I shall not,*" said Mrs. Elmore.

"Why? What has he done to offend you?"

"Nothing. But, since you wish to know why I disapprove of his visits, I will tell you. The fact is, M. St. Pierre's frequent appearance here has provoked general remark. I have heard that your name is often mentioned in connexion with his; and once I was asked point-blank if there was any actual engagement between you. If I should be asked that question again, Maude, what answer shall I give? Yes or No?"

"No!" exclaimed Miss Vernon, in a decided and angry voice; "or rather, give no answer at all. Refer them to me, and I will answer for myself."

"There is no use for you to get angry, my dear

child. You can't tie people's tongues. The world will talk."

"Well, perhaps we had better let the world have its way, auntie dear," said Maude, quickly recovering her good-humour. "You know it has been liberal with its favours, and has already given me twenty admirers I have never had in reality; and so, if another one is added to the number, it won't much matter."

Maude Vernon spoke with an appearance of indifference which she was very far from feeling. She was both angry and hurt that her name should even for a moment be linked with M. St. Pierre's. It was unjust to him; for he had given the world no right, either directly or indirectly, to suppose that she was more to him than any other lady of his acquaintance. It was unjust to her; for, whatever her thoughts might have been on the matter, she had never breathed them aloud. She wondered if the whisper had ever reached his ear? She hoped not. She prayed he might never hear it. If he should, how annoyed he would be!

What might he think of her? Perhaps he would fancy that some word or look of hers had been the foundation of this false report. Well, she could not help what was past; but she resolved to be careful for the future that no act of hers should give confirmation to such a report. She wished he had not been coming that night. It was, however, too late to prevent him now. But this visit should be his last. He should never be invited again; and if he called at any future time, she would refuse to see him.

She went upstairs and entered her dressing-room, with a firm, proud step.

"I shall not want you any more just now, Janet," she said, when her maid had released her from her riding-habit, and was about proceeding with the customary duties of the toilet. "I'll ring when I am ready to dress."

Left to herself, Maude Vernon hastened to lock the door, to secure herself from intrusion, and then sat down and remained still and thoughtful, with her hands fallen listlessly in her lap, and her eyes

cast upon the ground. Presently, excited by the conflicting feelings within her breast, she arose and walked rapidly up and down the room, muttering her tumultuous thoughts aloud.

"I was mad to think of him," she murmured. "to give all my heart—build all my hopes on one who cast not a thought on me. It has been like a dream—a long delightful dream; but I am awake now, and I will dream such dreams no more." She paused a moment, and then added, "How dare the world talk of me?—its prying eyes cannot dive into my heart to find what I have hidden there. I have never, by word or deed, betrayed my folly; no, my weakness is known only to myself and to my one mute friend who never questions, never condemns me."

She unlocked her "Davenport" and took from it a thick, closely-written volume. It was her journal; for she had accustomed herself from girlhood to chronicle in writing all her various thoughts and actions day by day.

I will read over once more all that I have

written," she said, "and then tear out every page that bears his name. I will destroy the record of my folly, and then forget him." As she spoke she opened her journal and sat down to scan its pages. A variety of feelings rose and wrestled within her as she read on. She became angry with the subject of her thoughts—with herself—and with the world. The first few pages bore frequent mention of Arnold's name, and formed so many chronicles of his sayings, doings, and noble qualities. She paused here and there and read aloud.

"No letter from Arnold to-day. I am dreadfully disappointed. I am afraid he is working too hard, and must be suffering from his old headaches again. Dreamt of him last night; thought we were walking through a pleasant country in the broad sunshine. Suddenly a storm arose, the rain fell in torrents, and dark leaden clouds drifted across the bright sky, and then descended lower and lower, till we were almost suffocated; then out of the thick clouds came a gray, shadowy figure, veiled

and shrouded. I could not tell whether it was that of a man or of a woman. As this figure glided rapidly towards and passed us, a cold, blast-like, piercing north-east wind blew on us. I looked down and saw a narrow stream of water at our feet, which widened and widened, till by some means Arnold and I were separated, and waves began to roll between us, rising and rolling till they were like a boiling sea, carrying Arnold farther and farther away. I looked towards him and saw him struggling fearfully with the shadow, while the lightning flashed and the thunder roared round them. It was horrible. I stretched out my arms to him, and awoke myself with a loud scream.—I hate dreams; while they last they are almost as bad as is reality. I shall write to Arnold, and beg him not to go on the water.”

Here the entry closed; but a little further on there was another, which ran thus—

“ Arnold has been at home three days. He has been reading Shakespeare and Dante to us alternately each evening. How thoughtful and tender

he is! so superior to most young men. I shall miss him very much; for he leaves home to-morrow. I wonder whether I shall ever meet any one whom I shall consider equal to him?"

With an angry "Pshaw!" she turned the leaves over till she came to the page she sought. It was the first that bore the name of "Raoul St. Pierre."

"Chance has made us acquainted with a French gentleman—a M. St. Pierre. He is very agreeable, I think; but Auntie evidently does not like him. She calls him 'a casual acquaintance,' and at first positively refused to invite him to the house; but I coaxed her, and she gave way at last, as she always does. Oh! if I could only describe him; but I can't, dear Journal—not even to you. He has such a noble face, and such a wonderful voice! He is like a living poem starting out of a world of dead prose.

"I remember where he stood, how he looked, and every word he spoke. Somehow he quite haunts me. I can see him and hear him still. I wonder when he will come again? As a

foreigner and a stranger, I think he has a claim on our hospitality."

Here there was a short break in the diary, but presently it continued :—

"We went to the Opera last night. M. St. Pierre was in the stalls. When he saw us, he came into our box and sat talking and criticising the music. He speaks English well, and has a wonderful command of language. I have already been able to form some estimate of him. I don't know whether I have formed a true one. To me he seems intolerant of anything frivolous or weak. I suppose that is often the case with those strong, high-thoughted natures; they despise everything that is below their own standard; small faults and small vices seem to irritate their more refined feelings.

"He has been here several times lately. He pays a great deal of attention to Mrs. Elmore, but he takes very little notice of me; indeed, at times I think he fails to pay me those trifling attentions which any lady has a right to expect. Perhaps

he looks down upon me as a mere thoughtless, giddy girl, and so much younger than himself. If he knew me, he might like me better. I should like him, however, to think well of me: the approval of such a man would be worth having."

Here the entry concluded; the next page was a mere chronicle of dull rainy days, and of her own low spirits. It was only when M. St. Pierre appeared upon the *tapis* that there seemed to be light and sunshine for her. Presently she met with another entry, which was as follows:—

"Oh, such a delightful morning! We met M. St. Pierre at the Botanical Gardens. He conversed with me much more than usual, and seemed interested in all that I said. I wore a brooch, a present from Arnold on my last birthday—a miniature of himself beautifully set. M. St. Pierre noticed it. When I told him it was Arnold, he asked me if Arnold was my brother! I am so angry with myself: I blushed, and looked excessively silly. This made bad worse. He smiled—oh, that wonderful smile!—and apologized for having asked

the question. I could have torn the brooch off and trodden on it. I will never wear it again—never!”

“What a pleasant thing it is to be able to babble out my thoughts on paper! I can talk to my Journal as I can talk to no living thing. It seems to be a part of myself, my dear friend and confidant! Arhold sent me a copy of Wordsworth yesterday. On the fly-leaf he has written ‘To my dearest Maude,’ and beneath my name a verse of poetry of his own composition. I wish he would not write such nonsense. It was all very well when we were children; now it is quite a different matter.”

In the pages of the diary she now turned over Arnold’s name occurred less frequently, until at length it disappeared altogether. M. St. Pierre’s too was rarely mentioned in a direct form; she spoke of him as “*he*,” as though he were the only one of the masculine gender worth remembering, and about whom there could be no possible mistake in the way of reference.

At some entries her eye softened and lingered lovingly ; she appeared to live over again the precious moments there chronicled. Then there came a change ; a feverish, restless spirit, full of hopes and fears, seemed to overshadow the pages ; the entries were various and mysterious. Presently there was a bright, bewildering joy, flashing here and there, but intermingled with grave reflections.

“How changed everything appears since I have known him ! Things that used to charm me once have lost their interest. I look with contempt on my former self, and am quite ashamed of the foolish, frivolous life I have led. The high estimate I once held of myself now has sunk very low ; I feel every day how inferior I am—how far below him. Oh, if he would only stretch out his hand, he might lift me up nearer to him, nearer to Heaven ! But he will not—he is too great, too proud to seek or prize a woman’s love.”

She now hurried on to the last entry she had made. “Sometimes I imagine he cares for me a

little. Not that he has ever said as much ; but his face changes, his eyes have a softer expression when they rest on me. I fancy, too, I can read his looks ; they say more to me than they do to all else. Besides, there is a lingering pressure of the hand when he says good-bye, as though he would fain say more. Why does he not?"

. "All is still the same ; we meet and part—no word of love escapes his lips, but there is a world of meaning in his eyes. Sometimes a thought comes over me that, if I were poor, things might be different. I have heard that some men carry their high-minded independence to such an excess that they would rather live steeped in poverty for ever than be raised to fortune by a woman's hand. Oh, if I thought that my riches stood between his soul and mine, I would melt down my gold and it should be my gravestone ! I admit it is mean, ignoble, to seek a woman because she is rich ; but it is not noble to reject her for it."

"Reject"—that word seemed to hurt Maude

Vernon's spirit and to grate on her ear. "Reject!" she murmured, and as she spoke she arose proudly from her seat. "No! a thing must be offered before it can be rejected. No look, no word of mine has ever betrayed my secret to him. He shall never know it. I hate him. How weak and foolish I am! It is not his fault if he cannot love me."

With compressed lips, and pale but resolute face, she tore into pieces every leaf that bore his name, or had any reference to him; then she gathered and crushed them together, threw them on the hearth, set them alight, and watched them blaze up. The flickering flames seemed to creep in and out, and linger lovingly wherever she had traced his name, as though loath to consume it.

When the last sparks died away, a sad, half-sobbing sigh broke from her; she felt as if some portion of herself had been reduced to ashes. She almost repented what she had done; she was half inclined to gather up the dust and guard it sacredly,

as some do the ashes of their dead; but the momentary weakness passed away. "No," she said, "I will not keep even that unconscious dust to remind me of my folly. I will forget both it and him."

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO BOUQUETS.

ANY one who had seen Maude Vernon, one hour after the occurrence related in the last chapter, would scarcely have believed that she was the same person who had watched the dying embers of her journal with such a sad, pale face.

She stood before her looking-glass, contemplating her charms in a seemingly satisfied state of mind. She opened her jewel-case, examined her trinkets, put on one bracelet after another; tried the effect of this ornament, then of that; but in the end rejected all, with a silvery laugh or quaint observation. A close observer, who knew her well, would have thought that there was

an unusual excitement in her manner, and that the glassy brilliancy of her eye and the rich glow upon her cheek were both too uncommon to be natural. Her maid, however, imagined her to be in a most delightful humour, though perhaps a little difficult to please; for she said she could not, or rather would not, decide upon the dress she should wear until the very last moment. She was so fanciful too about the arrangement of her hair: first she had it dressed in one fashion; then shook it all down and tried another; and at last decided, in defiance of the reigning fashion, to have it laid in classic braids across her forehead and gathered in massive coils behind. An exquisite wreath of flowers, that might have deceived Nature herself, was rejected with disdain; she contented herself with a single red camellia, placed behind her tiny, shell-like ear. Dresses of shining silk and gay-coloured, gauzy fabrics were thrown aside: she selected one of pure white. Her simple toilet was completed; and, although her maid bitterly lamented the

absence of jewels and bright colours, she could not help admitting that her young mistress was most lovely.

"Yes, you do look beautiful, miss," she said, surveying her critically on every side; "but this I must say, that if I was a lady I'd wear a trinket wherever I could find a place to put it."

"If you were a lady," said Maude, "you would have more important matters to think about."

Maude Vernon tapped at Mrs. Elmore's door, and went in, as usual, to be looked at and admired in private, before she presented herself to the public gaze of her friends, who would soon be assembling below. Mrs. Elmore was dressed and waiting for her.

"Look here," she said, uncovering a beautiful bouquet of the choicest flowers of the season: "this has just arrived from Oxford; and here is a note from Arnold, I dare say expressing his regret that he cannot be here to present it himself."

"Oh!" said Maude, slightly confused, as she took the note and placed it in her pocket, "I'll

read it presently. Dear Arnold ! it was very kind of him to think of me. These flowers are so lovely, it would be a pity to take them down-stairs—they will wither so soon in the heated atmosphere.”

“Why, Maude,” exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, much surprised, “you forget the rooms below are filled with flowers.”

“Ah ! true,” replied Maude, “but I only want those to last for to-night. I will put these from Arnold in the vase here—then they will be as fresh to-morrow as they are now.”

Mrs. Elmore looked vexed as she said, “They were sent for your pleasure, Maude ; and I think Arnold would prefer them to wither in your hand than to flourish elsewhere.”

Maude at once saw that Mrs. Elmore was hurt, and instantly replied, “Well, auntie, I will take them, if you like.”

“My liking is out of the question,” interrupted Mrs. Elmore. “They are yours—of course to do as you please with ; but, if I were you, sooner than they should be buried in the darkness of this

room, I would carry them below, and place them in one of the vases there. Your friends, at least, may admire them."

"So do I—very much; but you know, auntie dear, flowers so soon wither in the warm hand; and I really detest carrying a bouquet."

"You did not always detest carrying one," answered Mrs. Elmore.

"Perhaps not; but experience has made me wiser in the matter of flowers, as well as in other things," rejoined Maude. "Besides, I have seen so many beautiful bouquets, either withered, or carried off by some of my hundred-and-one admirers, that I am really anxious to save this one for dear Arnold's sake; in addition to which, it is much too large for me to carry. So I will take your advice and put it in a vase in the drawing-room."

As they descended the stairs together, a more striking contrast than the two presented could not easily be met with. The widow, with her sombre weeds, and grave, earnest countenance

chastened by sorrow, and prematurely furrowed by sickness and unavailing regret; and her companion, with her bright young face—

“ Like an orient beam that chases the night,
With its world of dark shadows, away.”

In truth, Maude was a charming specimen of pure young womanhood, full of grace and dignity. She walked through the rooms, which were glittering with lights and fragrant with flowers; she fluttered about, hither and thither, to see that all arrangements were completed; and she could not resist giving some finishing touch to many trifling things as she passed along.

The clock struck nine: the company began to arrive; for there are some conscientious people who carry their virtue to such an extent as to arrive punctually at a ball, conversazione, or even at a “kettle-drum.” Maude Vernon, smiling and bright, as though no shadow had darkened her spirit, or tear dimmed her eye, was ready to receive

them, and their felicitations on her having attained the important age of twenty-one.

The rooms gradually filled : a monster quadrille broke the dull, formal ranks arranged against the walls. This was soon walked through, as solemnly and gravely as the first quadrille of the night generally is. Then arose the buzzing sound of voices in search of and engaging partners for the coming waltz. The music struck up an inspiring air, and set the waltzers in motion ; in an instant, as if by magic, fifty couples at least dashed about with the velocity of comets. Bright colours, which would have delighted a Watteau to paint, floated about, changing their positions as constantly and effectually as a kaleidoscope ; and Maude Vernon's birthday ball had commenced in earnest. Never had she seemed so exuberantly gay, been so lavish of her smiles or so quick in her sparkling repartee ; she was, indeed, the queen of the hour, radiant and blooming.

Years after, when she recalled the events of that night, it seemed like a dream, a dazzling vision,

filled with glowing lights and fairy figures, flitting about in wild confusion, and over all rolled the rich music, wave upon wave, a whispering sea of sweet sounds; while she herself seemed to have been wandering about, a wan white thing, with mocking laughter rolling from her lips, in search of something which she could not find.

Maude cast many a quick and expectant glance at the door as time passed on, and M. St. Pierre failed to make his appearance. Presently she saw his tall, grand figure threading its way with serpentine movement slowly through the maze of the whirling dancers. She caught his attention, gave a smile of recognition, and swept past him. She felt that he was watching her, and rather impatiently too, she fancied; but she was in no haste to stop. One by one the waltzers dropped out of the magic circle, breathless and panting from their exertions. She was the last to retire; and, as if desirous of showing that she was still unsubdued, she joined the promenaders who were parading up and down, in and out, like a regiment off duty

waiting for the roll-call to summon them to their ranks again. At last she complained of being tired; and her partner, a young officer in the Guards, went with her in search of a seat. They approached M. St. Pierre. She stopped and greeted him in a pleasant, careless way.

"I suppose I ought to say I am very glad to see you; but I should be wrong if I did. I am not. I exhausted my welcomes hours ago—you are so outrageously late."

"If I have lost my welcome, I am late indeed. Whatever other pleasure I may have missed, I hoped to have been in time for that," said M. St. Pierre.

"I think they are to form for the Lancers," said Captain Lee. "You have promised me another dance to-night, Miss Vernon. Let us join this."

"Oh, pray excuse me this time," said Maude; "I really am quite tired. But I will try and get you another partner, as charming as myself."

"That would be impossible," said the gallant captain, smiling his admiration.

"Oh, don't despair; I think I shall succeed. There's Miss Metcalfe. Amy dear, you are not engaged, are you?" The young lady made a show of consulting her tablet before she ventured to answer "No."

"I'm so glad," continued Maude; "here is Captain Lee positively dying to dance with you. Captain Lee, Miss Metcalfe. If he makes himself half as agreeable to you as he has done to me," whispered Maude, "I won't answer for the consequences." Captain Lee and Miss Metcalfe paired off to take their places. Then, turning to M. St. Pierre, Maude added:—

"I am afraid Captain Lee will think it very rude in me to break my promise; but I have been dancing so much that I really am quite tired."

"I should think so," said M. St. Pierre; "you have exerted yourself too much. I never saw you dance with so much spirit before."

"That is because you have never seen me dance with a partner I like so well."

"Probably not," he answered, coolly.

Maude half repented of her speech, but, looking up provokingly in his face, added, "You know that Captain Lee is considered one of the best dancers in London."

"I should think that very possible," returned St. Pierre: "light heads and light heels generally go together. A man may easily excel in dancing who excels in nothing else."

"How contemptuously you say that!" said Maude; "but do you not mean to dance at all to-night?"

St. Pierre shrugged his shoulders negatively.

"No," continued Maude; "how I pity you!"

"And if I were so foolish as to dance, I should pity myself," replied M. St. Pierre, cynically.

"I wonder if *I* could tempt you to be foolish,"

said Maude, with an air of the most simple and charming coquetry. "Come, the music will soon strike up; just one turn with me. You are wise so often, I'm sure you might forgive yourself for being foolish once." She held out her hand, and playfully added, "What! refuse a lady's hand?"

M. St. Pierre was struck by the change in Miss Vernon's manner; for, however much her naïve and playful humour had shown itself to others, to him she had always been shy and reserved until now. He could not quite understand it, man of the world though he was. Indeed, perhaps it would have been difficult for her to have understood or explained the circumstance herself. She seemed to be animated by a spirit of reckless daring, and to abandon herself to her mood, unthinking and uncaring whither it might lead her. A few hours back she had resolved to treat him with hauteur and coolness, to show the world how little she cared for him; then to dismiss and forget him. To follow the windings and turnings of a woman's mind, through

the intricate labyrinths which love pleases to take, would fill a volume, and perhaps after all be to little purpose. In every soul love delights to make a separate mystery to deceive the world, while in reality it deceives itself: always new, yet always old; ever varying in its means, yet ever the same in its end.

M. St. Pierre took Maude Vernon's offered hand, and said, in a low, agitated tone, "If you become the tempter, I may commit more follies than you would be inclined to pardon."

"You would find me very merciful," replied Maude. "Remember, I should be judge and jury too; besides, if I tempt you to commit the sin, it would be unjust in me to refuse forgiveness. But do you really dislike dancing, or do you think it is wrong?"

"Wrong! oh, no! that is simply a matter of opinion. I merely think it is a foolish exhibition."

"But still a very pretty one. Look," said Maude, directing his attention to the dancers, "I

think that a very agreeable sight; to me it is almost as pleasant to sit and look on as it is to dance."

"Yes," he answered, glancing with a critical eye over the fair faces and bright figures that floated round him, "it is a pretty sight; but still there are two people in this world whom I should be sorry to see among them."

"Two people!" uttered Maude, thoughtfully; "who can they be?"

"The woman I love, and the man I respect," said M. St. Pierre, curtly.

There was something so peculiar in his tone and in his look as he spoke these words that Maude scarcely knew what reply to make. After a momentary pause, however, she adroitly changed the conversation by admiring a bunch of white camellias which he held in his hand. She pronounced them charming.

"They must be something more than charming, Miss Vernon, since they attract your notice," he answered; "pray take them."

"Oh, no! I could not think of robbing you of them."

"I brought them purposely for you," urged M. St. Pierre: "surely you will not refuse to receive them?"

As Maude hastily put forth her hand to take the flowers, Mrs. Elmore, grave, watchful, and sedate, came up, evidently with the intention of interrupting the *tête-à-tête*. She made a slight bow to M. St. Pierre as she said—

"Miss Vernon *detests* carrying flowers, monsieur. Give them to me, my dear," she continued, addressing Maude: "I will take care of them for you."

"Thank you, auntie," said Maude, regarding her with a proud, half-defiant look, "I will not carry them in my hand: I will place them here;" and she immediately arranged them in the folds of her dress.

Before either of the two had time to continue the conversation the dance was over, and the gay crowd came sweeping down the room in search of

refreshments. Some distinguished guest claimed Mrs. Elmore's attention, and Maude Vernon and Raoul St. Pierre were carried away in the stream.

CHAPTER IV.

WON.

MAUDE VERNON's birthday party was over. The last carriage had driven from the door, but the lights burnt on; for one guest was lingering still, though all the rest had departed, and that guest was Raoul St. Pierre. He stood apart from the glaring lights and fading flowers, looking triumphantly proud and happy upon Maude's bright face. He wondered what the world would say when the news of his good fortune was trumpeted abroad; for he had won the prize so many had sought in vain. She had promised to be his wife.

Raoul St. Pierre possessed characteristics that made him one of the most striking figures that

could be conceived. He did not seem to be young; certainly it could not be said that he was old. The most experienced were puzzled in their judgment, their opinions differed so widely. Some said he must be about thirty; others smiled, and pronounced him nearer fifty. Be his age, however, what it might, there was not a wrinkle upon his forehead, and his intellectual but unfathomable face was full of varying lights and shadows; the more you gazed upon it the more you were puzzled, and never seemed to read a line aright. His voice, that organ which exercises such wonderful power over the human soul, was full of rich music, and those who heard him speak once wished to hear his voice again; nor did they ever forget it. His figure was tall and stalwart, but withal his movements were full of grace and dignity. He was not a man to be overlooked, even by his enemies.

M. St. Pierre knew that in Maude Vernon he had won a rich prize, but he seemed in no way outwardly elated. He indulged in no rhapsodical

speeches or passionate declarations; he uttered no silly professions, such as he might have smiled to think of in after-years: yet there was a pride in his tone, a strength, a power in every word he spoke, that seized her spirit and carried it on with resistless force, as the strong current will carry away the frail leaf that falls upon its surface. Her soft hand lay in his strong broad palm; the pale moonlight rested upon her upturned face, which was eloquent, almost glorified by the warm love that welled up from her full heart, lighting every feature, and looking out tender and true from her clear blue eyes. A noble pair, and full of striking interest, they appeared, as they stood there hand in hand, ready to embark on the broad ocean of life together. Everything looked bright and promised fair for a long and prosperous voyage; no threatening clouds obscured the sky, they saw no breakers ahead, nor thought of the sunken rocks that sometimes lie concealed beneath the calmest waters.

He had spoken to her in an honest, straight-

forward manner, making no attempt to conceal the fact that he was a poor man. He certainly was possessed of a small estate, he said; but he relied chiefly on his own energies and talents as a physician for advancement in the world. He told her that from the first moment of their acquaintance he had admired and esteemed her more than any other woman he had ever seen, and his admiration had deepened into a stronger feeling, till it became a passion. Believing that his suit would be hopeless, he had resolved, more than once, to leave the country; but the temptation had been too strong. He remained, and won his prize.

"I have neither rank nor title to bestow upon you, dearest," he said; "and yet you, with your youth, wealth, and beauty, have a right to demand all worldly honours and distinctions."

"And what are worldly honours and distinctions to me?" she answered. "Am I not honoured and distinguished enough by your love, Raoul? As for my youth, and what you call my beauty, I

have never prized either ; now I shall do so, for they are no longer mine : they are yours. You speak of my wealth. I am not so silly or romantic as to despise *that* ; I value it, not for itself, but for the power it gives."

"Ah ! Maude," he said, "like all women, you love the power of gold !"

"And do not you ?"

"I ?" and as he pronounced the word he bent his brows, and sent a keen, searching glance upon her face.

"Not you alone," replied Maude, "but all wise men, and women too ; for none but fools would despise that which all pronounce to be good. Think what power there is in gold to relieve suffering, encourage genius, and reward merit."

"To say nothing of the gilded gaieties and pompous pleasures it permits you to enjoy," returned Raoul. "Ah, Maude ! Maude ! to some hearts and in some cases gold is impotent. I must teach you that the highest and holiest joys

of this world are not those that can be bought with gold."

"You have taught me that already, Raoul," she answered. "I know that untold wealth could never buy one true, honest heart, like that you give me; and I am grateful for the gift, and prouder of your love than of anything else in the wide world. Do not misunderstand me; because I speak sincerely. I know that I am rich, and I rejoice in the knowledge of it. I have lived in the world, and I sympathize with every throb of its great heart. I value all I have, and every advantage I enjoy; but, far above all, I value you, Raoul: for wealth could never bring me half the joy I feel to-night in the assurance of your love. That to me is beyond all price."

"Dear Maude!" he said, tenderly, as he drew her nearer to him, and laid his hand caressingly upon her golden hair, while he pressed the first warm kiss upon her fair forehead.

"Never speak of wealth again, Raoul," said

Maude, "nor let it stand spectre-like between you and me."

"It has stood between us, Maude, almost too long. Often, when your sweet beauty has drawn me to your side, the monster Gold, giant-like, has warned me off, and I have resolved to leave you, and turned away sorrowing."

"Until now," she exclaimed, nestling closer to him, and lifting her face, bright with her soul's trust, to his: "now you have cast it down; and it can never rise again: for all that I have is yours. I am no longer rich; I am nothing; I have nothing. I will own no friends, no wealth, no power, no hope, no joy that is not yours. Put me to the test, Raoul, and I will cast aside all that I have, give you my hand and heart, and follow you through the world, with no jewel but your love, no possession but yourself."

"Heaven bless you, dearest, and make me worthy of your true womanly heart! Pardon my mistrustful nature, Maude. Poverty makes men

proud and suspicious. I almost wish you could resign your wealth."

"I will—to you," she answered, smiling.

"No, not to me, dearest; for I am resolved to receive nothing from you, except yourself. People may, and most probably they will, say that I have married you for your riches."

"They would not dare to insult you with such a thought; nor shall you trouble me with such foolish fears. The greatest and proudest lady would be honoured by your choice. Come, let us talk of the future, of your beautiful home in the South of France; for it is in the south, is it not?"

"No," he said, interrupting her, "let us think and speak only of the present. Come here, Maude, where the moonlight is brightest, and let me look upon your face."

"You have looked upon it often, Raoul, and noted it but little," she said, half reproachfully.

"That you cannot tell," he answered; and he drew her nearer to him until her face was upturned to his, her head lay upon his breast, and his dark

beard mingled with her golden braids. "I look upon you now with different eyes." He paused a second, and then added, "Love is a great beautifier, Maude. You were always lovely, but now you are beatified, transfigured beneath the light of my love, and the soft awakening of your own : for you love me, dearest, do you not?" His voice, subtle and sweet, crept into her ear and round her heart till it could hardly sigh her answer. "And you believe in me, and *trust* me, Maude? No matter what the world may say, or how you may be tried, you will never doubt me?"

She raised her head and answered: "Never! I will trust you always as I trust in Heaven!"

"I have often dreamed of this hour, Maude, as we dream of heaven when it is a long way off, and I have been tormented with a hundred doubts and fears; my age, too (which must be double your own), I have contrasted with your youth and freshness, and at times I have doubted whether I ought to wreath so sweet a Spring flower with my Autumn-tinted life. But the heart will not grow

old with the body ; and when first I saw you, from the moment our eyes met I felt there was a sympathetic cord between us, which tightened every hour, and drew you nearer and nearer, until you lay here, as you are lying now, here upon my heart. Maude, there is no obstacle between us now. Your friends may think my age an objection; but you——?" and he looked inquiringly at her face. She answered with arch gravity—

"Well, I am not sure; I have never thought about it. But how old are you really, Raoul? You must be almost forty?"

"Almost," he said, and smiled.

"Ah, then, that is an obstacle." There was something touching in her very archness as she spoke. "I don't think you are quite old enough; for I made a vow, before I was ten years old, that I would never marry any man until he had grown gray, like my own father; and I associate all that is true, generous, and good with his dear gray hairs." Her voice trembled, and her eyes half filled with tears.

"I can never hope to rival him, dearest," said Raoul.

"No," she answered: "a good father can have no rival."

"Well, I shall be in your hands," he answered, "and it will be in your own power to bring about the catastrophe, to turn my hair gray, and my light into darkness, Maude."

"You mean, I may plague you into premature old age. Well, perhaps I may take the hint; at present I am satisfied with you as you are. But we forget that time is flying: I am sure it is very late. You must go, Raoul."

"May I come and speak to Mrs. Elmore to-morrow?"

Maude, for the first time, looked startled and embarrassed.

"No, I will speak to her myself, now—before I sleep," she replied.

"You look confused, Maude," said Raoul, quickly; "what is it? Are you afraid? Has Mrs. Elmore any authority over you?"

"Oh, no—none whatever," answered Maude.
"Only——" she hesitated a second.

"Only what?" said Raoul.

"Her husband, Mr. Elmore, was my guardian—I suppose you know that—and since his death she has been almost—indeed, quite a mother to me."

"Well."

"And I think she may be vexed," said Maude, growing more and more confused. "That is all."

"No, that is not all," St. Pierre answered, decidedly. "Proceed, Maude. There must be no secrets between us. I hate half-confidences. I must know everything."

"You make me speak in spite of myself, Raoul," she said, blushing deeper and deeper. "I may be wrong. I have only a suspicion; and I have no right to give it words. It is only my imagination; and you know our thoughts often deceive us."

"Your thoughts are mine now, dearest. Come, give them to me. I must know what it is you think."

"I am afraid she will be vexed—because," and Maude hurried to the end of her sentence, "she has a son. He returns home to-morrow; and I believe she wishes me to marry him."

"And you?"

"I!" she answered. "Oh, no! I never thought of that."

"But has he?"

"How can I tell?" she replied, evasively. "You said just now I could not dive into men's hearts."

"That is an equivocal answer, Maude. Have you given him the right to think that you would marry him?"

"How inquisitorial you are! quite a tyrant in embryo, Raoul! Well, perhaps I have encouraged him just a little. We have been always together, you know. He is only two years older than I am, but he has always been very kind and attentive to me. When I was quite a child he used to carry me about and call me his 'little wife.'"

"I suppose he is clever?"

"Clever? Oh, yes. He is reading hard for honours at Oxford, and excels in the composition of essays and poetry. I think he will be a second Tennyson. I will show you an ode he sent me on my last birthday."

"Of course he is handsome?" said Raoul, carelessly: "all young poets are."

"To me he is," she replied, simply. "But then I see his spirit in his face: he is so gentle, good, and true, and such a comfort to his poor mother. I don't think he would be generally appreciated in the world: he is too quiet and retiring. He makes no figure in society, but he is the life and soul of home. I think you will like him, Raoul. Of course, you must be friends. But, to appreciate him thoroughly, you should know him as well as I do."

"He holds so high a place in *your* esteem, dear Maude, that he may well dispense with mine. I have never heard you speak so eloquently as you do now in praise of Mr. Elmore," said St. Pierre.

"Because you have never seen me stirred by

a subject I like so well. You shall see him to-morrow, and then you will be able to judge for yourself."

"It is almost to-morrow now. So good-night, Maude."

It was some minutes, however, before the last "good night" was said, and Raoul St. Pierre really departed. Maude watched him from the door, and, when his form was no longer visible to her, listened to the sound of his receding footsteps until their very echo had died away in the distance. She then lighted her candle and went slowly upstairs.

Maude Vernon would have been a study for a painter could he have seen her then. She wore no ornament of any description to enhance her beauty, except a single flower in her hair, and the small bouquet of white camellias given to her by M. St. Pierre, which she had placed in the broad sash encircling her slender waist. Her complexion was dazzlingly fair, except where the colour deepened on her cheek like the heart of a blush-

rose. Her features were regular, delicate, and full of expression ; the curving lines of her mobile mouth showed a highly sensitive, but at the same time a firm, decided nature. Her eyes were of a deep violet blue, but had more passion and fire in them than are commonly found in eyes of that colour ; they were shaded by long sweeping lashes. Her wavy hair, of that golden tint which the old Italian masters loved so much to paint, was thrown back off her face, and arranged in graceful braids around her well-shaped head ; her high, white dress clasped her swan-like throat and swept the ground in rich folds at her feet, as she ascended the stairs, her face radiant with her new-born joy.

As she approached Mrs. Elmore's room, the radiance suddenly departed from her face, and it became clouded and troubled. For the first time in her life Maude felt nervous and shy at the idea of meeting her old friend. She knew her communication would give her pain ; she had a misgiving too that her unconditional acceptance of M. St.

Pierre would be severely animadverted upon ; but she resolved to bear it bravely—what would she not bear for his sake ?

She tapped hesitatingly at the door, and a genial voice bade her “ Come in.”

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOW OF EVIL.

Mrs. ELMORE, as Maude entered, was seated in her dressing-gown by the fire-side; for, though the weather was warm, there had been a fall of rain during the night, and the damp always made her feel chilly; she suffered, too, occasionally, from neuralgic pains. At her feet lay a large smooth terrier-dog, his nose on his paws, and his intelligent eyes blinking at the glare of the fire. She sat patiently waiting, for she knew that Maude never retired to rest without coming to have her "good night" kiss, as she had always done from her first entrance into the house.

During the last hour or two Mrs. Elmore had

listened impatiently to the music and merry laughter going on below. The gay voices fell with a hollow sound on her ear. Mirth and merriment were sadly at variance with the feeling that filled her heart, which was oppressed and heavy. She sat there dreamily gazing into the fire, her mind crowded with thick-coming fears and fancies. She had observed Maude's ill-concealed pleasure when M. St. Pierre entered the room, and the evident delight with which his attentions were received; her annoyance at seeing Maude accept the foreigner's flowers had been openly exhibited, and it rankled in her heart still, when she remembered that her son's bouquet had been rejected. She upbraided herself, and fancied that she had been a careless guardian in permitting Maude to be exposed to the fascinations of this "casual acquaintance." Mrs. Elmore resolved to be more careful in future. She knew it would be vain to speak to Maude on the subject, having observed that in some matters her ward was wayward, and would not be controlled. She therefore resolved to act

without speaking, and to withdraw her silently and secretly from the scenes and associations with which she was now surrounded.

Many plans and projects presented themselves to Mrs. Elmore's consideration, but she could not, on the spur of the moment, decide on any one in particular. She must have time for reflection; meanwhile she resolved to keep a careful watch over Maude's actions, and leave her as little as possible to her own thoughts and guidance. Mrs. Elmore felt that her position was an extremely difficult one. She had never liked M. St. Pierre, and her dislike had deepened into an absolute repugnance. The very mention of his name created an irritable feeling in her mind. Maude must be separated from him—that was certain.

In the midst of these grave reflections she heard Maude's light step upon the stairs; she cleared her brow, and prepared to welcome her with the usual affection.

She smiled pleasantly as Maude entered, held out her hand to her, and said—

"I hope you made my excuses to your friends, Maude; I was sorry to be compelled to leave you, but I really felt quite faint and ill."

"I am very sorry," answered Maude, leaning caressingly over her; "are you better now?"

"Oh, yes, much better; but the heat of the rooms, the perfume of flowers, and the combination of artificial scents quite overpowered me."

"I think the use of perfumes ought to be altogether forbidden in society," said Maude, "or else everybody should be compelled to indulge in one scent only at a time; the combined odour of rose and patchouli, musk and jockey-club, with a dozen other things, is dreadful. I don't wonder at your becoming faint. Get out of my place, Stray." She laid her hand upon the creature's glossy back, and, moving him from the stool, placed herself upon it. While he crouched at her feet, with his head upon her lap, Maude took Mrs. Elmore's hand affectionately, and laid her cheek upon it, casting a shy, nervous glance upon the widow's kindly face, as she said—

"This has always been a kind of confessional to me; how many of my faults and follies have I confessed and repented here! It is a long time since I first made you my confidante."

"A long time, indeed," said Mrs. Elmore, dreamily; and her thoughts wandered back to the little golden-haired orphan-girl who, smitten with her first sorrow, had sobbed herself to sleep in her arms, more than ten years before; and many other memories rose from the buried past, and sighed with mournful significance through the widow's soul. A cloud had fallen upon her life since then, but its leaden hue was changing rapidly, and the silver lining becoming day by day more visible; for the spirit of her beloved son tinged it with rainbow hues.

"A long time, indeed," she repeated, in answer to Maude. After a momentary pause she added, "Well, what news now, love? I am sure you have some special secret to tell me." A chill feeling crept over her as she spoke—she dreaded to hear what that secret might be. "I can see it in your face;"

then she stooped forward, and, observing her more attentively, said anxiously, "You look troubled."

"Oh, no; not troubled," said Maude, lifting her face up, and letting the light stream full upon it. Mrs. Elmore saw how radiantly happy she looked; the fire of love was kindled in Maude's soul, and lit up her brow, smiled from her lips, and sparkled in her eyes. A shadow black as death fell upon the widow's spirit; she half closed her eyes, and her voice sounded strange, even to her own ears, as she said, nervously—

"What is it, Maude? Tell me quickly."

"M. St. Pierre—has spoken—to me—to-night."

"Well."

"He has asked me—to be his—wife."

"And you refused him, Maude?" exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, almost shrieking the words. "Say you refused him!"

"No," replied Maude, amazed at her unusual vehemence: "I have accepted him."

"Then you have done a mad and foolish thing, which must be undone!" exclaimed Mrs. Elmore.

"Must be undone!" echoed Maude, startled at such strange passion and excitement in one who was generally so quiet and grave. "No, it can never be undone. Why should it? I love him."

Her whole soul seemed to burst forth in these last words, and for a short space of time Mrs. Elmore sat the image of speechless, bewildered grief; then a low, wailing cry broke from her lips.

"Maude, Maude!" she exclaimed, "you have broken my boy's heart; you have blighted his happiness, and destroyed your own."

Mrs. Elmore leaned back in her chair, and burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh, what have I done," cried Maude, throwing herself beside her, "that you, my best friend, almost my mother, should speak such cruel words to me? Blighted Arnold's happiness! destroyed my own! What can you mean? Is it strange that I should marry the man I love, and who loves me? Why do you look at me with such mournful eyes? I have always brought my joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, and confided them to

you ; now, when I bring you my greatest joy of all, when I most need your love and sympathy, you refuse me both, and only speak to wound and to upbraid me. Why will you not rejoice when you see me happy ?”

“Forgive me if I have spoken harshly, Maude. I did not mean to hurt you. I might, I ought to have expected this ; but I did not. You have taken me by surprise. You may be happy, but I cannot rejoice when I see that my son’s life is blighted ; for you know that he loves you.”

“I ?” answered Maude, slightly confused : “how can I know that which he has never told me ?”

“There was no need to tell you, Maude,” said Mrs. Elmore, bitterly : “you must have seen it in every glance, have read it in every action, have felt it in your own heart, though with your lips you deny it. He has been your companion, your friend, since you were ten years old. You were the idol of his boyhood ; and he has never failed in his devotion to you. His happiness in the present, his hopes for the future, are all centred

in you. You have accepted every token of his regard, and encouraged his love, until now. It was cruel—it was wicked, Maude,” she added, angrily; “and now you will sacrifice him, and for a stranger!”

“I have always considered and loved Arnold as a brother; and as such I love him still,” replied Maude. “Had I professed to love him more, I should have deceived him; nor can you expect that I should sacrifice myself for him.”

“Sacrifice!” exclaimed the mother, almost fiercely. “To be my son’s wife would be no sacrifice, even to the proudest lady in England.”

“The poorest girl who works for her daily bread would be a sacrifice if she married a man she did not love,” returned Maude.

“But you loved him once, Maude; fickle and changeable—I had almost said false—as you are, do not deny that,” said Mrs. Elmore, bitterly.

“I will not attempt to deny it,” answered Maude; “but I do deny that I am either false or fickle. I never did, I never could have cared for him in the way you wish that I should.”

"You cannot look me steadily in the face and repeat those words," replied Mrs. Elmore, sternly. "You know there was a time when my son was all the world to you, and you were happy and content in the knowledge of his affection. You may tell me that you have but exercised a woman's right to change; but you cannot deceive a mother's eyes. Do not deny that you once loved, or thought you loved, my poor boy. God help him now!"

Maude knew there was a force of truth and justice in Mrs. Elmore's words, and felt keenly for her distress. She had a right to be aggrieved. Maude, indeed, had frequently upbraided herself. She was aware that her feelings towards Arnold Elmore had changed. When a child she regarded him as a hero; when a girl she had been strongly attached to him, for he had studied her every wish, yielded to her every caprice, and was ever ready to sacrifice himself and his own pleasures on her account; but as she grew to womanhood a gradual change came over her. Old feelings were swept away, and had been replaced by new ones. The

calm and quiet love she had once felt for Arnold Elmore had faded into nothing before the strong storm of passion raised in her by the fascinating power of Raoul St. Pierre. Now she knew what love was ; before it was imagination.

When Mrs. Elmore angrily upbraided her, she answered in a low voice—

“I may have had a girl’s first foolish fancy for Arnold ; but that passed away long ago. I know how good, generous, true he is ; but I could not love him as he deserves to be loved.”

“Then you might have taught him to cease to love you,” said Mrs. Elmore, bitterly ; “but you would not. You have led him on with false hopes, encouraged and played with his affections ; and now you have the heart to turn him adrift and tell him that you love another.”

“He will forgive me,” murmured Maude. “I shall tell him that we have both been dreaming, and it is time that we awoke.”

“Child, I believe you are dreaming still,” answered Mrs. Elmore, half sorrowfully ; “and from

my heart I pray that you may have no such terrible awakening as that I dread."

Both were silent for a time. Maude was grieved to the heart; love had already brought her sorrow, and compelled her to wound her best and dearest friend.

Mrs. Elmore was thinking regretfully of her son, who, perhaps, at that very moment was wasting the oil of life by the solitary midnight lamp, ignorant of the cloud that had been gathering above his head, and which would burst over him on the morrow.

In the midst of her sorrow for her son, Mrs. Elmore's kind, womanly heart, in spite of her anger, yearned sympathetically towards Maude, who, she felt, was about to take a fatal step—one, too, that once taken could never be retraced. She was, however, compelled in justice to admit that Maude had a right to choose whomsoever she pleased. If she chose badly, the fault would be hers, and so would be the punishment.

Mrs. Elmore's regrets for her son were blended

with severe self-reproaches ; for she had been the confidante of his love, the partner of his wishes, and had promised to keep faithful watch and ward over his idol ; but she had been betrayed, blinded by her own over-sanguine spirit. Now, in the eleventh hour, when the sweet flower had gained its full richness and beauty, this foreign, unknown stranger had come to gather and carry it away in his bosom, leaving nothing to them but withered hopes and vain regrets. She shrank from the idea that she must soon face her son ; and he would then have to learn the truth. She well knew that a man's nature is often embittered, and the whole course of his life changed, by such early spring sorrows as these, and trembled for her son ; but she would not give up all hope yet. There should be no more upbraidings—she would try other means ; so she stooped forward and kissed Maude's flushed cheek soothingly, as she said—

“ I will try to reconcile myself to anything that brings you happiness, dear child ; though I grieve for my son's sake, I will try to rejoice for yours.

But are you sure you love this man, whom, I must say, you have so rashly chosen, without thought or reflection?"

"Not without thought," replied Maude; "for he has been the whole subject of my mind for many weeks."

"He! a stranger, of whom you know nothing?"

"I know enough in that I know I love him and that he loves me."

"Or feigns to love you; for he knows you are rich, Maude; and money is a great temptation to such as he."

"To such as he!" echoed Maude, rising up and pacing the room angrily, touched now to the quick.

"With what scorn you say that! You will not even mention his name. Tempted by my money!" she murmured over and over again, as though communing with herself. "Mean and ungenerous; but he said it would be so."

After a slight pause, she again addressed Mrs. Elmore, her figure drawn to its full height, and

flashing the full light of her beauty in the widow's eyes.

"Tempted by my money!" she repeated. "Am I ugly, old, and withered; have I no attraction, none but my gold, that could tempt a man to love me? Shame upon you for trying to poison me with such a thought. If you suspect him of seeking me for my wealth," she added, pausing suddenly before Mrs. Elmore, "why have not I a right to suspect your son?"

"My son, Arnold Elmore, has been your friend and brother the greater portion of your life. You dare not suspect him; and you are ungrateful to him and to me if you couple his name with such a thought."

Maude's generous spirit was in a moment subdued. She knew that she was unjust to Arnold; and, though his mother had insulted the man she loved—her affianced husband—she had no right to insult her former friend and companion. It was a meanness her noble spirit rebelled against.

"I am sorry if I have grieved you," she said,

dropping into her accustomed place at Mrs. Elmore's feet; "but you have hurt my feelings, and my baser nature teaches me to make a like return." She looked coaxingly into Mrs. Elmore's face, and added, "I know you do not like foreigners, but you must try to think and speak kindly of M. St. Pierre for my sake: *he* never speaks of *you* without respect."

"Because he dare not; for he knows you would not permit it."

"Ah!" said Maude, quickly; "then in that he does me justice so much more than you do."

"How?"

"You say, and you are right, that I would not allow him to speak ill of you, my friend; yet you suppose I will allow *you* to speak ill of *him* who is to be my husband."

Mrs. Elmore made no reply; in fact, she could not, for she was beaten with her own argument. She made an attempt, however, to excuse, or explain her feelings.

"I may seem prejudiced, Maude, but I have an

unconquerable repugnance to that man. From the first moment he entered this house it seemed as though a shadow had fallen upon it; the shadow has grown darker and darker, and crept nearer and nearer, until it has fallen on you—a shadow of evil to come;—for so sure as we two now are face to face, that man, my heart tells me, will bring evil to me and sorrow to you. You may, perhaps, smile, Maude; but you know I am not given to superstitious fears or idle fancies; yet I feel as if there was some spiritual power struggling within me, striving, but failing to reveal itself to my actual senses; awakening only a dim shadow and dread, which takes the form of his face. It haunts me, Maude; it seems graven in the air. Sometimes in the dark I feel a chill, and tremble; then I see his face gleaming white and cruel at my side. Once I dreamt of him—oh, such a dream! I shudder at the recollection of it.”

“You dreamt of him!” exclaimed Maude. “My dear auntie, you surely would not let your dreams by night influence your actions by day? Why,

what are dreams? Remember what your favourite author, Dryden, says—

‘ So many monstrous forms in sleep we see,
That neither were, nor are, nor e’er can be.’

Why, I dreamt last night that Arnold was going to be hanged for some impossible crime,” continued Maude—“I forget what it was now—and that you, in a white surplice, tolled the bell!”

“You dreamt *that*, Maude!” said Mrs. Elmore, evidently excited: “then your dream and mine are somewhat alike; differing only in this, that M. St. Pierre not only tolled the bell, but dug the grave with his own hand. My boy, however, would not lie still: he rose up and grappled with him; and you, Maude, stood calmly by, and never stretched forth a hand to help him.”

“Your dream is easily read,” returned Maude: “your hatred to M. St. Pierre, love for your son, and your desire to take me from the one to give me to the other. It is mere imagination altogether.”

"It may be as you say, Maude," replied Mrs. Elmore. "As a rule, I have no faith in dreams; but still they will sometimes affect even the wisest of us. Quite apart, however, from dreaming, I have a strange presentiment that all will not be right. I struggle against the feeling, and cannot overcome it. You know I am not strong. I have tried to fancy and believe that my nerves are weak and disordered."

"And they are disordered," rejoined Maude. "What but a diseased brain could give rise to such thoughts and feelings as you have encouraged against a man who is almost a stranger to you, and has never done you wrong! You know nothing bad of him?"

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Elmore, candidly.

"You have never heard even a whisper to his discredit?" continued Maude.

"No, never—except the whispering of my own soul, which has been long and loud," said Mrs. Elmore.

"Let such baseless whisperings then be hushed

and stilled by the breath of charity," replied Maude, "and at least, until you know, or have reason to suspect, that he is evil, give him credit for good."

"I cannot. Bear with me a moment longer, Maude; remember I have given you a mother's love and a mother's care, and it is right that you should listen to me patiently, and heed me well."

"Heed what? Foolish, unrighteous fears, or the evil nightmare of a dream? Why, we often dream bad things of those who love us best. Dear Mrs. Elmore, for my sake try and forget these things. I have often wondered why you have such a strong dislike, amounting almost to antipathy, to foreigners; but there is no reason why you should concentrate all on him I love."

Mrs. Elmore drooped her head upon her breast, and for some few minutes remained in deep thought. Maude sat by her side watching her with anxious affection. Presently she lifted her head, and, looking with affectionate solicitude on her young ward's face, said, gently—

"To-morrow, love, I will tell you why I tremble when I see those crafty strangers creeping about our pleasant English homes ; for to me it seems they must always come to taint or to destroy. To-night I have said enough ; to-morrow you shall hear my story : it is but brief."

When Maude at last retired to her own dressing-room, she dismissed her maid after an unusually brief toilette, and sat down to try and think calmly over the events of the night. Her mind was in a whirl of delicious confusion ; the past was to her as though it had not been. Hitherto she felt she had only dreamed of life ; now she was beginning to live in reality. The future, as yet a confused chaos, where all was unsatisfactory and indistinct, was now open to her view—a realm of untold joys, a paradise which she, like another Eve, might wander in and enjoy to the fullest. Raoul St. Pierre kept the gate and pointed the way ; for through him only could she enter and behold the glory. The light of her own love sent forth its scintillating rays wherever her

thoughts rested; she saw no serpent's trail, no shadow of evil stretching dark and grim before her.

While she sat pondering over such untranslatable thoughts as fresh, newly-fledged love brings to its nest, the face of Mrs. Elmore, sad and unsummoned, came before her. The impressive words, the excited manner, and the unmistakable grief with which she had received the announcement of her engagement to Raoul, all crowded before her. Why should this be? Why should *she* be tormented with doubts and fears whose sole aim and object was to destroy her happiness? And Maude Vernon grew angry with her old friend for looking darkly on her new love.

Meanwhile Raoul St. Pierre returned slowly to his hotel, threading the solitary streets with a measured, cautious tread. There was no lightness in his steps, no music rising up from his heart, and playing sweet variation on the old story of human hopes and human love.

When he reached his room, he threw himself wearily into a seat. He was so changed, so

different to what he had been an hour ago when he had stood with Maude Vernon's head resting upon his breast, looking into her blue eyes, and showering soft kisses on her brow. The light had died out of his eyes; they looked cold and cruel. There was no need now to control his looks; the muscles of his face relaxed: Art had done its duty, and Nature was allowed to resume her sway. He looked like one full of inordinate desires, weighty cares, and trembling expectations; as though his mind was one broken mass of corrupt thought, the effects of a powerful but misdirected nature. With bent brows and compressed lips, he sat contemplating the host of weird images that crowded before him; but he contemplated them like a man who is sternly resolved to combat and conquer, to trample beneath his feet every obstacle that stands between him and the accomplishment of his will. Amidst all the dark, impish forms that flitted through his disordered brain, Maude's fair face, surrounded with its golden glory, was the only thing that smiled.

Presently his eye fell upon a letter, which till then had remained unnoticed upon the table. The light sprang again to his eyes; not the soft light of love, but like the fiery lightning that leaps and flashes before the thunder roars, and the storm breaks, and the rain, torrent-like, begins to fall.

He read it attentively, from beginning to end; then folded it systematically together, held it to the light, and watched it shrivel up bit by bit till nothing but the ash remained.

"To London!" he murmured, with a hissing sound between his teeth. "No, by Heaven! that at least must be prevented." Then he peered into every corner of the room, and gathered together every bit of paper and destroyed it, being particularly careful to allow not even a bit of blotting-paper to escape the flames.

CHAPTER VI.

HASTY SUMMONS.

THE next morning, when Mrs. Elmore and Maude Vernon met at the breakfast-table, both tried to indulge in their accustomed chat, and to appear as though nothing had occurred to ruffle the even tenor of their ways; but they tried in vain. The conversation, in spite of their endeavours, would not run on in its usual channel; awkward gaps and pauses would continually intervene. Mrs. Elmore put sugar into the milk-jug, and Maude salted her tea. Old Stray, their favourite terrier, sat on his hind-legs and begged; then walked round the table, and whined to have the delicate tit-bits placed upon his long nose,

that he might toss them into the air, and catch them as they fell. He went through all his various antics, barking and talking according to his fashion; but he was unnoticed—a neglect he did not at all understand; and, in his endeavour to attract attention, and make his presence known, he jogged Mrs. Elmore's arm just as she was raising her cup of coffee to her lips, and upset it in her lap. Maude, hastening to assist her, trod on the dog's paw, and sent him off yelping; in fact, everything seemed to go wrong, or, as the old saying has it, "quite contrary."

Any attempts to seem cheerful, or to make themselves agreeable to each other, failed most miserably; both were evidently under restraint and ill at ease. Breakfast-time had never hung so heavily: that which most filled their minds seemed to be a forbidden subject between them; for both, as if by arrangement, avoided all mention of M. St. Pierre, though his name was continually rising to their lips, resting dumbly there, and freezing all other matters of general discussion.

And, as it generally happens, when a subject is particularly unpleasant, it is the very one on which we are most inclined to talk; and, to those who are accustomed to live in affectionate and familiar intercourse, any such restraint is painful—almost unbearable.

The morning papers were brought in; Maude, as usual, read the leading articles aloud, but Mrs. Elmore offered no comment. Presently the postman's knock was heard, and a letter was delivered to Mrs. Elmore from her son; she read it eagerly, and then handed it across the table to Maude without a word. It ran thus—

“MY DEAREST MOTHER,—Good news! I have just passed my examination with honours! Hurrah! My brain is in such a whirl I scarce know what I write; but you will excuse inelegant language for the sake of the tidings. They say that I need change and rest—that I have worked too hard. And I must say that I feel rather *seedy*; so I shall take a holiday. The sight of you and our darling Maude will work wonders

in me in a day. I hope to arrive to-morrow. I should have taken you by surprise; but I am a coward, and am afraid that if I come unexpectedly you may be out. Maude is such a merry Greek, tell her I am coming, and I know she will stay at home to receive me. Good-bye, and God bless you, dear Mother.

“From your dutiful and loving Son,

“ARNOLD ELMORE.”

Maude folded and returned the letter in silence. It was evident that Arnold wrote in buoyant spirits. He was full of hopes and expectations, which, to his sanguine nature, seemed like certainties. He had no feverish doubts or fears; he was coming home triumphant in his newly-won honours, his heart stored with the rich love of years—all for her; and she must reject him, rob him of the sweet fruits which had ripened beneath her own sunny smiles, take from him even hope, and reduce the fire of his affections to ashes.

The stern, solemn grief that sat upon Mrs. Elmore's face wounded Maude to the heart; but

she felt that, for Raoul's sake, as well as for her own, she must be firm. There must be no wavering now. The first words she spoke after reading the letter were:—

“Shall I see him and tell him the truth at once?” She paused an instant, and added, “I think it will be best.”

“Are you quite resolved, Maude? Has a night's reflection wrought no change in you?”

“None, dearest auntie. How could I change? Last night I gave my word, and promised myself, and all that is mine, to the man I love. There can be no change. In me my love, whether for good or evil, will always remain the same. So far as marriage is concerned, my fate is sealed.”

“Not yet, thank Heaven!” murmured Mrs. Elmore. Then she added, aloud, “I will only ask you one favour, Maude. It is that you will give yourself a little time to consider the step you are about to take, for it is a very serious one; and, before you bind yourself irrevocably to M. St.

Pierre, you should learn something of his family, his antecedents."

"I am not curious about either," replied Maude. "I have no wish to pry into his past life: all my interest is vested in the present; and the future only belongs to me. As for his family, he has told me all that is necessary for me to know concerning them."

"Of course," said Mrs. Elmore, with as much scorn as her nature possessed, "he has boasted that they are noble?"

"On the contrary," answered Maude, "he acknowledges that misfortunes have left them merely respectable. All his nobility lies in himself."

"Ay, when he says nobility *lies* in him, then I believe he speaks truth," said Mrs. Elmore, with a slight sneer.

"Do not let us speak of him at all," replied Maude, with an angry flush rising to her cheek; "your suspicions irritate and distress me. I ought not to listen to them; for in defending

him I may forget the respect that is due to yourself. Let us agree that his name shall not be mentioned between us until you have learned to treat him with the regard he merits. It is better we should be silent on the subject than for ever disagreeing upon it. I must own I am much hurt and disappointed; for I had hoped that for my sake you would have received him kindly."

"I could not. It was all very well to tolerate him in a mixed society, where one cannot always choose one's own company; but to receive him here as a member of my own family—for I own your affianced husband ought to be dear to me—I could not. You might as well ask me to cherish a cold, creeping toad in my bosom."

As Mrs. Elmore ceased speaking there was a sharp ring at the door-bell; the next minute a hurried step passed along the passage. It was only eleven o'clock—too early to expect visitors. Who could it be?

"Can it be Arnold?" said Maude; and she

turned a shade paler as she glanced anxiously towards the door. She trembled at the prospect of meeting him ; not that she dreaded his anger : it was his sorrow she feared ; the thought of that grieved her more than the wrath his mother so openly exhibited.

“ No ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, pointing to Stray, who erected his ears, showed his teeth, and uttered a succession of low, angry growls. “ Look at your dog ! Only one man enters this house whom that creature by instinct knows to be dangerous ; and he warns you, Maude. Those dumb creatures have a subtle sense. There is something offensive to them in the very atmosphere that surrounds an evil-doer, and they scent him afar off as a wolf scents blood.”

The door opened, and the servant informed Maude that M. St. Pierre wished to see her in the drawing-room.

Before she went to receive him, Maude turned to Mrs. Elmore and said, “ From this moment the name of M. St. Pierre must not be mentioned

between us, until one or both of us have changed. Let there be no allusion to my engagement, either directly or indirectly. You have said you do not approve of it; that is enough. For the future, any reflection on my affianced husband will be an insult to me, and I shall resent it as such."

She walked proudly to the door and then paused. She could not bear to leave her kind old friend in anger; her warm heart triumphed over her ruffled spirit; in a second she had turned back, and, leaning over Mrs. Elmore's chair, said coaxingly, "Dear Mrs. Elmore, forgive me; you know I am a spoiled child. I have never been crossed or contradicted, and I cannot bear it now. If you will forget that I have been angry, I will forget that you have been unjust. Let us meet at luncheon, and remember nothing but the affection and duty we owe to each other."

Before Mrs. Elmore had time to reply Maude was gone, and in another moment Raoul St. Pierre had folded her in his arms. After a brief indulgence in tender inquiries and loving answers,

Maude observed that he looked pale and harassed, and told him so. He acknowledged that he was troubled, adding—

“You will not be surprised, dearest, when I tell you that on my return home after leaving you last night, or rather this morning, I found a letter informing me of the serious illness of my mother.”

“I am very sorry to hear it,” said Maude, sympathisingly. “Of course you must go to her.”

“Yes,” he answered, “there can be no question of that, but I am grieved to part from you.”

“But it will not be for long?”

“However short my absence may be in the calendar of time, it will be long to me. It is hard that, just as I have won my prize, and scarce had time to clasp her in my arms, I must tear myself away.”

“It is hard, too, for me to lose you,” said Maude, and her voice trembled slightly as she spoke; “but I will not complain, nor say a single word to

detain you ; for it is right you should go to her.
When do you think of starting ?”

“ Within an hour.”

“ So soon !” burst involuntarily from Maude’s
lips.

“ It cannot be too soon, love,” said Raoul,
gravely ; “ my mother is sick, perhaps dying, and
praying for me, her only son, to come and receive
her last blessing. Even now I may arrive too
late ; if so, I shall never forgive myself ; for love,
even to you, dear Maude, must not lessen my duty
to her.”

“ Oh, go at once !” exclaimed Maude. “ I love
and honour you for your impatience to be with
her. Ah, Raoul ! you give me another glimpse
into your nature, which shows that your heart is
both tender and true. If you loved your mother
less you would grieve me more ; for, if a son
neglects his mother, I should fear he might
one day neglect his wife. Your devotion to
her is a guarantee that you will be faithful to
me.”

“Faithful for ever, dearest ; trust me, wherever I go you will be with me, visible to my sense, though absent from my sight. There will be no hour in the day that I shall not think of you ; from the hour I start I shall long to return, that I may refresh my eyes by gazing on your bright face, my own, my wife that is to be. For I swear——”

“Make no rash vows,” said Maude, laying her finger playfully on his lips : “your eyes may be refreshed, and your allegiance tried, by some fairer face before you return to mine.”

“I would be ungallant enough to admit as much,” he answered, “if you held me by the bond of beauty only. That might be easily broken ; for the love that is born of beauty is as perishable as beauty itself. I love you for your true warm heart and noble nature, Maude ; for the spiritual grace that animates your thoughts and guides your actions ; for the beauties of your soul, dearest, which will live and flourish long after youth has fled and beauty died away. Were I a hot-

brained young lover, Maude, I should look no farther than your face, and swear you were perfection."

"Then I should not believe you."

"But you may be nearer perfection in my eyes, dearest, than I choose to tell you," said Raoul, with that soft, mysterious smile of his. "But, after all, the poetry of true love loses nothing by the prosy light of truth and reason; indeed, it is by time, truth, and reason that it must be tried and tested before it is proved pure; and, please Heaven, Maude, so shall my love be tried and proved to the end of our lives. Ah! dearest, if I get on this subject, I shall forget everything else, even good manners; before I leave I should like to pay my respects to your kind friend, Mrs. Elmore."

Maude felt much embarrassed at his proposition. She was afraid lest her kind old friend, in her zeal and affection for her, might wound the proud, sensitive spirit of her lover. With as much delicacy as possible, she told him how ungra-

ciously Mrs. Elmore had received the news of their engagement.

Raoul seemed neither hurt nor offended; he only smiled, and said, "I knew it would be so, dearest; still it is right that I should see her, listen to her objections, and learn what she may have to urge against our engagement. For your sake, as well as for my own self-respect, it is necessary that I should have an interview with Mrs. Elmore."

"When you return," pleaded Maude.

"No, love, before I start. Have no fears. I shall hear all patiently. However offensively Mrs. Elmore may please to behave to me, I shall not forget what is due to your friend and to myself. Where shall I find her?"

"I will show you the way," said Maude, "if you are determined. I think she is in the breakfast-room. No, on second thoughts, I will send down word that you wish to see her." She rang the bell, and on the servant appearing, she requested him to inform his mistress that M. St.

Pierre desired to see her, and would not detain her long.

Good-breeding compelled Mrs. Elmore to receive her visitor, though much against her inclination.

Maude remained upstairs impatiently awaiting his return. She thought the interview between Raoul and Mrs. Elmore would never have an end. She paced up and down the room; then stood still, and listened, as if she could hear what passed between them. What could they be saying? Surely they might have said all that was necessary to say in five minutes! A thousand vague fears crowded on her mind. She looked at the time-piece, and watched the minute-hand creeping slowly on. Time travelled with lightning-speed through her brain, and yet minutes seemed like hours; until at last she heard the sound of the parlour-door opening, followed by Raoul's tread upon the stairs. Her heart leaped with joy; she had felt a wild dread lest some harsh word or bitter expression might fall from Mrs. Elmore's lips, and goad

him to leave the house without a farewell to her.

When he entered the room his face was pallid, as though rage or fear had driven back the blood; but his smile was as soft as ever when he answered to her inquiring look, for she spoke no words—

“Well, dearest, I have said and done all I can; but Mrs. Elmore is determined not to forget my poverty, nor forgive my religion.”

“That is no matter,” said Maude; “but, Raoul, had you not been the soul of honour, how easily you might have concealed both?”

“She insists that I am the Evil One in disguise; but come, the short time we are together let us speak of ourselves, and thank Heaven that Mrs. Elmore has not the power, as she has the will, to part us. I have so much faith in you, Maude, that I go with a light heart; though the very atmosphere you breathe is impregnated with distrust and suspicion of me, yet I have no fears, for I know it will have no effect on your true and

faithful spirit. You must write to me often, dearest, and give me a full record of your daily thoughts and actions. You had better address your letters to me at my own house at Beauvais; from thence they can be forwarded to me, and I shall be sure to receive them; for I do not know what may happen, nor how long I may remain with my mother."

He had many requests to make and many parting injunctions to give her; all of which Maude faithfully promised to fulfil. She would fain have learned from him everything that had occurred in his interview with Mrs. Elmore; every detail, every word would have been interesting to her; but he was evidently averse from saying more than he had already said upon the subject.

Within one hour after Raoul had left Maude Vernon's side, he was being driven rapidly over London Bridge, hurrying to catch the Dover train.

When the two ladies met at luncheon-time,

Mrs. Elmore briefly alluded to her interview with Raoul St. Pierre.

"In spite of what you call my prejudice, Maude," she said, "I like to be just; and I must admit that, so far as words are concerned, M. St. Pierre has spoken like an honourable man, and met all my objections with satisfactory explanations."

"I knew he would!" exclaimed Maude, delightedly.

"Still," continued Mrs. Elmore, "it is easy for a man to speak well of himself, especially when there is a prize like you to be won. No man will knowingly allow his own words to mar his object. M. St. Pierre, however, is quite willing that I should make inquiries concerning himself and his family, both for my own satisfaction and for yours."

"Not for mine," interrupted Maude; "as I have already said, I know enough, and I am satisfied."

"I told him," said Mrs. Elmore, without heed-

ing Maude's interruption, "that I had a relative living at Beauvais, to whom I should address my inquiries."

"You!" exclaimed Maude, surprised; "you have a relative at Beauvais, and for all these years I have never known it! Who is it?"

"My own twin sister," answered Mrs. Elmore, with a sigh.

"Your twin sister," said Maude: "how strange! I have never even heard of her existence."

"Perhaps not," replied Mrs. Elmore. "But her story is a sad one; it pains me to speak of it or of her." She sighed deeply as she continued, "Poor Constance! we were never parted, even for a day, until long after Arnold was born." She paused a moment, visibly affected; then added, "Age does not always ripen a woman's judgment, Maude; sometimes, as in my poor sister's case, it ripens her follies and leaves her judgment green."

"Ah! I remember now," exclaimed Maude. "Occasionally, not often, you receive letters with a foreign postmark; and I have often wondered

from whom they came, for I have observed that after receiving one of those letters you are always low-spirited, though I have never known the reason why. I guess now they were from her."

"You guess truly," sighed Mrs. Elmore. "Ah, Maude, there are some troubles which we shrink from speaking of, though they must be borne in silence. But there, do not let us speak of her any more now, love; some other day I will tell you all concerning her."

Maude had too much delicacy to press Mrs. Elmore further on a subject which evidently was a painful one to her, though her curiosity was strongly excited.

The afternoon was taken up by a constant succession of visitors; Mrs. Elmore's heart beat at every knock, for she longed, yet dreaded, to see her son.

In the evening, just as the hissing urn was set upon the table, and Maude had placed herself behind it, a hansom-cab dashed up to the door,

and out sprang Arnold Elmore. His feet seemed to have wings ; for he literally flew up the stairs, past the servant who opened the door, and in a moment had folded his mother in a fond embrace.

CHAPTER VII.

L O S T .

ARNOLD ELMORE was about twenty-three years of age, but he looked considerably older; for he was a grave scholar, and thought will sometimes plough lines in the face before time has graven a wrinkle upon it. He was of moderate height, slightly made; but, owing to his sedentary occupation, he had acquired a habit of stooping, which made him appear less tall than he really was. His light-brown hair shaded an open intellectual forehead; his large blue eyes were so full of thought that common observers at times might think them dull, for their light, kindled by the lamp of knowledge, flashed only in strange fitful

gleams. When his heart was touched by a tale of oppression, or his spirit stirred by any great and noble act, he spoke with an enthusiasm that astonished his hearers; his whole soul then seemed to be inflamed with the subject, and language flowed from his lips in a perfect flood of eloquence, rushing onward like a torrent bearing all before it. Rich in imagery, graceful in thought, and strong in argument, he rarely failed to triumph over all opposition.

At Balliol College, where he matriculated, some few of the students formed among themselves a debating-club (in addition to their regular debating-rooms), for the constant exercise of their reflective and argumentative powers, in order that by continual practice they might acquire the habit of speaking in public without nervousness or hesitation. At these parties, where some of no mean powers entered the lists, Arnold Elmore invariably carried the palm. Though his features were homely, their expression varied with every thought that floated through his mind; he was

never two minutes alike—there was always something fresh and refreshing in his face that made it pleasant to look on. Wherever he went he was always a welcome guest ; and his coming home had in the old days been a holiday to Maude.

She received him now, on his return home, with her usual sisterly affection ; complimented him on his success, and rejoiced over his triumphs, as she would have done had he been, indeed, a beloved brother. There was, however, an embarrassment in her manner which he, in the lightness of his heart, failed to see. He did not even notice the grave sadness that sat upon his mother's brow. All things were *couleur de rose* to him at present. One of the great objects of his life was won ; he had gained high honours, and come home with his fresh-gathered laurels to show their glory to those he loved best.

He had thrown himself into an easy chair ; his mother sat by his side, holding his hand in her warm, proud clasp. The steaming urn was on the

table, giving home such a comfortable home-look ; and there was Maude, more radiantly lovely than ever, listening to him, laughing with him, and now and then throwing a saucy saying at him, as he told some quaint story, or lively anecdote, of which he was himself the hero. As he finished his last cup of tea, a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

“By-the-by, mother,” he said, “I have a letter for you from the master of my College. I expect it is filled with my praises, and is intended to impress you with a full sense of the treasure you possess in such a son as your humble servant. I’ll fetch it.” As he spoke, he rose up and left the room.

“Maude,” exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, with trembling lips, “I cannot bear to see my son so full of fresh, joyful life, when I know you are going to turn it all to gall and bitterness ; the sooner it is over the better. I will leave you alone with him. Tell him all, but tell him gently : for my sake, deal with him tenderly.” She walked slowly

towards the door, then she turned back, and added, with a sorrow that had a touch of fierceness in it—

“Maude, had you not been as dear as a daughter to me for so many years, I should hate you now, for you hold my son’s soul in your hands; he is at your mercy. If it is your will to wound him, he must suffer; and *I*, the mother who bore him, am powerless to save him from a single pang. I have no power even to heal him. God help me!”

Her grief for the coming sorrow of her son had something tragically touching in it, which roused all Maude’s sympathies; and, as Mrs. Elmore was passing out of the door, she sprang forward, threw her arms round her neck, and kissed her, saying—

“Trust me: to hurt him would be to wound myself.”

Mrs. Elmore had scarcely left the room when her son re-entered it. He was not sorry to find Maude alone; he went straight to her side, took her hand and kissed her cheek as he had done a

hundred times before. She had always received it as calmly as she would have received a brother's kiss; but now she blushed crimson, and turned away her head. Her blushes, and the unmistakable agitation he witnessed, made his heart bound with exquisite pleasure. He believed it was the fluttering of love's expanding wings that sent the rich blood coursing through her veins; he stole his arm softly round her waist, and tried to draw her to him, and turn her face that he might gaze upon its beauty, and watch its varying expression, as he revealed the fulness of his love.

"My darling Maude," he said, fervently, "I shall not rest quite happy until you congratulate me again, and tell me how much you rejoice in my success, how heartily you share my triumphs. You must know that I have hurried home while my honours were fresh and green to offer them to you."

She felt the time had come when she must speak out, to prevent his saying more, and to save herself the pain of refusing him. She raised her

head, fixed her eyes calmly upon him, and said affectionately—

“Dear Arnold, I do congratulate you with all my heart, and rejoice sincerely in your success; as for your triumphs, you can have none that are not, though in a less degree, mine also; for you are, and have always been, dear as a brother to me.” The word “brother” grated upon his ears; but she continued softly and shyly: “And now that I have congratulated you, Arnold, it is your turn to congratulate me.”

“Congratulate you! On what? and why?” As he spoke a cold chill crept over him; his heart seemed to stand still, as though he had a foreshadowing of what was to come, and he awaited in terrible suspense her answer.

“Look there,” she said, showing him her finger, on which Raoul last night had slipped the antique ring which he had bought the previous day. The jewel flashed with a cruel light in Arnold’s eyes, and for a second almost blinded him.

Well, he said, his eyes riveted on the ring,

"I see a serpent twining round your finger, Maude. It is a foolish trinket. Where did you get it? Take it off. If you will give it to me, I will buy you one ten times its value."

"It was given to me by a dear friend," said Maude; for she did not like his allusion to the form of the ring.

"A dear friend!" he repeated.

"Yes—one whom you must like for my sake; for those who love me will, I know, be dear to you."

With an indistinct idea of the terrible truth he was about to hear; dreading, too, the utterance of it by Maude, he said, in a bewildered tone, and looking piteously in her face—

"Explain; I do not quite understand. What does it mean?"

"It means that I am engaged to be married, Arnold," she answered, steadily. She did not look in his face as she said this, but she bent her eyes earthward. She knew he heard her, for his arm gradually dropt from round her waist.

"Married!" he gasped, his voice so changed

that his own mother would not have known it. "Oh, Maude!" He staggered back as though he had received a blow, and fell into the nearest seat. "Married!" he repeated the word again and again, drearily, in a vacant, wandering tone. It seemed as though a thunderbolt had fallen and paralysed his senses, destroyed his powers of speech, leaving only the last word his ears had heard branded upon his tongue. Darkness had fallen around him. Life five minutes before had been full of light, a palace of joy, with youth, love, and hope on the threshold, sending rich music echoing through the halls of the future. Where was that airy structure now? Shattered by a breath! The breath of a fair woman had had the whirlwind's power to blight and to destroy. It had swept over the fair prospect of a life, and left all in ruins. Maude's terrible announcement had come to him so unexpectedly that he was quite unprepared to receive it, and when the words fell upon his ear his spirit reeled beneath the blow. A mental convulsion was taking place within him,

shaking every nerve, and throwing his thoughts into a state of chaotic confusion, full of the broken imagery of shattered hopes and ruined expectations. At length a bitter cry for his lost love arose from his heart, and went trembling forth into the future.

For some minutes Arnold sat still and silent, with the pallor of death upon his face, his eyes vacantly fixed on Maude. In those few moments he lived an age. His silence, the wan look that settled on his face, and the strange, expressionless gaze he kept upon her, frightened Maude. She had expected an outburst of sorrow, reproaches, entreaties, but not this dead, frozen, awful calm. At first she waited for him to speak; but when he neither moved nor uttered a word, she went to him, threw herself on her knees beside him in great grief, and said—

“Oh, Arnold! speak to me; you break my heart with that cold, dead look. Speak to me; do speak. This silence terrifies me.”

Her voice, her touch, roused him. Slowly the

light came back to his eyes; he looked at her in speechless sorrow; then a sigh, that sounded almost like a gasp for breath, burst from him. With a sudden impulse he stretched out his arms, drew her towards him, and strained her passionately to his heart.

"For the first—last time!" he murmured; his head fell upon her shoulder, and he sobbed aloud.

She permitted him to give free vent to his emotion, and her tears mingled with his. She knew that he would be better and calmer when the first paroxysm of grief was over, and she endeavoured to soothe him with gentle words.

"Dear Arnold, I did not think my words would have this effect upon you. I am heartily grieved for you; but what can I do? what can I say?"

"Nothing now," he answered, releasing her from his embrace. She rose up, and stood by his side, her clasped hands resting on his shoulder. After a moment's pause, he added, "I know I am weak and foolish in permitting myself to be unnerved. You will forgive me for the pain I give

you ; but, Maude, I always thought—I believed—my mother led me to believe—that you loved me. I never doubted, I never dreamed that you could love another. The belief that your heart was mine has grown up with me. I never thought to ask the question: to me it was a matter of faith. I received it as we receive holy truths, without doubt or question.” He was silent for a few minutes ; then, looking on her face with scrutinizing sorrow, he continued, “I can hardly believe it now—you engaged to be married ! How and why has it happened so ?”

“Why !” echoed Maude : “because I have seen one whom I would have chosen before all, and he has chosen me. I should be very happy, Arnold, if you would be content.”

“Content !” he repeated, somewhat bitterly. “It is easy for you who have loved and won to be content. But I, who have loved and lost, cannot so easily be reconciled.” Here a feeling akin to hope came over him, and he said, earnestly, “But are you sure, have you thought well, Maude, whether

it really is love you feel? or is it the inclination of a moment that will pass away and leave me my own to be won back again?" His eyes brightened as he continued, "How long have you known this—pardon me, I do not know his name?"

"Raoul St. Pierre," said Maude.

"A stranger? He must be so: I have never heard his name."

"Oh, no; he is no stranger, Arnold: we have met him often, your mother and I; we have known him almost three months."

"Three months!" echoed Arnold, with an unnatural laugh. "And for this acquaintance of a day you will reject the love of years!"

He rose up and paced the room excitedly, muttering partly to himself and partly aloud: "While I have been away working and toiling, with my thoughts ever fondly wending their way back to you, my own pure, beautiful one, *he* has been here living in the light of your eyes, perhaps clasping you in his arms, whispering in your ear, and pressing his kisses on your lips; while *I*——Curse him!"

He had worked himself up to a state of frenzied excitement; but the vehemence of passion which had found an outlet in the utterance of a curse upon the destroyer of his earthly happiness, seemed to recall him to his better self, and he had scarcely pronounced it when he added—

“God forgive me! Oh, Maude, we are poor, weak creatures; our own vile passions seem ever in our unguarded moments to make war upon our souls; for even I, a Christian, curse this man, because you say you love him.” He paused in an agony of doubt, and then continued, “I will not believe it, Maude; you deceive yourself, and take the shadow for the substance. It seems impossible that you should love him, the friend of a day, as you love me, whom you have known for years, I may say from your childhood.”

“Love is not measured by length of years, Arnold. As well might you try to limit, inch by inch, the lightning’s speed as limit love’s unconscious growth by time or circumstance.”

Arnold paced the room thoughtfully for some

moments ; and then, almost startling her by the abruptness of his question, he asked—

‘Since when have you engaged yourself?’

“Last night.”

“And I beseech you to answer me truly, Maude. Had I come to you before you had seen him, and asked you to be my wife——” Maude interrupted him quickly, saying—

“I should have answered then as I answer now. You have always been dear to me as a brother, Arnold ; but I never have—I never could have loved you as I love him—never!” she added, emphatically.

“I have been deceived,” he said, humbly ; “I have deceived myself ; it has been a delusion from first to last. I have been vain, presumptuous, mad ; and it is right that I should suffer for my folly.”

“It will be but a brief pain, dear Arnold, and soon over,” said Maude, soothingly.

“So will life itself,” replied Arnold, calmly ; “yet there are times when we wish it ended at

once. I should like now to lay my head back, close my eyes, and open them no more in this world. I know it is a wicked wish, for I have work to do, and perhaps I shall rouse myself and do it; but, oh, Maude, it is a dull and dreary world to live in when we have lost all that we consider worth living for!"

"What man dare utter so profane a thought!" exclaimed Maude. "Not you, Arnold, I am sure; you know too well how much both God and man require from all of us to speak so recklessly."

"I know it is wrong," said Arnold, "to question the ways of the great Inscrutable; but my misery deadens me to everything but the loss I have sustained. Come here, darling; kneel down, and let me look at your face for the last time."

"Last time?" she echoed, mechanically obeying him.

"Yes, last time," he answered; "for I cannot, and I will not, see your face again."

Smoothing the hair back from her forehead,

and gazing intently on her face, he stooped forward and impressed on her brow a calm, quiet kiss. His look was so wretched, and his voice so full of sorrow, that it made the tears start to her eyes.

"I came home an hour ago," he said, "light-hearted and happy, full of pride in the present and full of hope for the future; I shall leave it a sad, broken-hearted man."

"Oh, no! Arnold—no!"

"Yes, Maude, yes. With me these are no idle words. I am hurt, spirit-wounded; and if I could I would rather creep away and die than live and recover, as recover I shall; but I must carry a crippled spirit with me to the end of my days. You have grown into my heart, absorbed my youth and all its rich spring feelings. What is left for me but the dry husk and the refuse of life?"

"You will gather fresh strength, and all your spring blossoms will bloom again. Remember your mother," urged Maude.

"Ah, yes, my mother—my poor mother!" he exclaimed.

"For her sake you must bear up," continued Maude: "the sight of your distress would grieve her to the heart. Her love for you is so dear; you are her idol, her whole care in this world. For her sake then, as well as for mine, try and be cheerful; let her see that you are calm and resigned, at least, or she will reproach me, perhaps hate me, for having wounded you. You would not wish to rob me of my best and only friend, Arnold?"

"No, Maude, no; you shall not suffer, for you have done no wrong," he answered. "Does my mother know all that you have told me?"

"Yes."

"Then she must know that I will be grievously hurt; nor will she expect me to rejoice over my own sorrow."

"I think you do not quite understand me, Arnold," said Maude, timidly. "I want you to reconcile your mother, as well as yourself, to your disappointment. Let her see that you can bear it,

and she will learn to bear it too. For my sake, try and be, or seem, cheerful. Your mother's eyes reproach me so bitterly that I am much concerned at it. She looks upon me as the cause of grief to you, and considers me ungrateful in bringing sorrow and trouble on the home that has hitherto sheltered me so long and so tenderly. There has always been peace and love between us, and there should be no disunion now. You say you love me, Arnold: do not let your love be laden with your mother's hatred."

"God forbid! No, Maude, my love shall bring no evil to you. I will do all I can to reconcile my mother with you. Come, we will go to her at once; there is little use in prolonging this painful interview. I shall leave town to-morrow; it is wisest and best that I should go. No consideration shall induce me to stay. 'Lead us not into temptation' is our daily prayer; and we have no right to linger when we feel temptation is near. Until I have learned to look on you as the wife of another, to look on you at all is sin."

They descended to Mrs. Elmore's room. When they entered, the widow sorrowfully and penitently looked into her son's face, as though to deprecate his anger for having misled him.

"We have both been deceived, mother," he said, gently controlling his voice, and looking somewhat resigned: "Maude has told me everything." There was a slight twitching about the mouth as he added, "She never cared for me: we were wrong to believe she did; and she is not in any way the least to blame. You hear, mother, I say *she* is not the least to blame. I have told her so, and wished her all happiness and joy in the husband she has chosen; you must do the same."

"My poor son! my dear boy!" said Mrs. Elmore, her over-wrought spirit dissolving into a rain of tears. "Thank God, you are so strong and brave! I trembled for you."

"It has been a trial, mother," he answered, in the same tone; "but the worst is over. I have received a severe blow; for one like Maude cannot be loved and forgotten in a day. But I shall

recover. I shall try that 'sweet milk, philosophy,' and perhaps after awhile come back to you with a healthy spirit, as strong and brave as ever."

"Back to me!" exclaimed Mrs. Elmore.

"Yes," replied Arnold. "You know, as I have already told you, that I have been working hard, and that all my friends at Oxford have advised my seeking rest and change. Now I feel that they are right. I hoped to have rested here; but, after what has passed, I cannot. I must go," he added, decisively. "It would be madness for me to remain with you. As yet I have not decided how I shall act. Most likely I shall go abroad and travel for a time; but to-morrow I shall decide."

Mrs. Elmore looked at him steadily for a moment: she seemed to understand him better then, for she answered with a sigh—

"I shall be grieved to lose you; but perhaps your decision is a wise one, and no doubt for the best."

"I trust it is. But, mother," he added, his voice softening with deep tenderness, "I shall leave you a sacred trust to hold whilst I am away. Maude is unhappy because she has been the unconscious cause of grief to us. The fault is not hers: it is our own; and she must not suffer. I have pained her enough already. Take her to your heart, for my sake; love and cherish her. Let there be no harshness, even in thought, between you. Remember, a shadow upon her brow will travel to me, wherever I may be, and lie like a cloud upon my path. My ill-placed affection has disturbed your mutual confidence. I shall go away happier if I can restore harmony between you, and know that you will love and comfort each other."

"I will study all your wishes, my dear Arnold," answered Mrs. Elmore, turning at the same time to Maude, who stood by her side, and taking her hand. "I am somewhat resigned already; for I see how well you bear your great trial. But I sorrow for my own sake, as well as for yours. If you have to

regret her loss, I also have to do the same. She has been as a daughter to me, and I feel a mother's pang at parting with her; for she is going with a stranger, and to a strange land."

"May God's blessing go with her!" exclaimed Arnold, his voice rendered husky by the passionate emotion he vainly endeavoured to control. "Let us talk no more of this," he added. "We have all to grieve, more or less, and our wounds will never heal while they are kept open and probed by regrets which are as vain as they are useless. For the few hours I am at home let the matter rest. We will talk of something else. Come, Maude, what shall it be? This is the last night we three shall be together for Heaven only knows how long! and you know the last few nights previous to my leaving home have always been merry ones. Why should not this one be merry too?"

Mrs. Elmore suggested that they had all had excitement enough, and had better retire early to rest.

"No!" exclaimed Arnold, "I cannot retire

yet: I could not sleep. I feel a desire to sit up and talk all night. Come, Maude, second me. You can't—you are 'not in the humour? Well, I am—my brain feels as though it would burst if I were quiet;" and so he talked on in a wild rambling fashion, one moment with reckless gaiety, the next with thoughtful gravity. At times there broke such flashes of mournful tenderness, reflecting on the past, that Mrs. Elmore found it difficult to restrain the outward expression of her grief. Her son's feverish excitement caused her more anxiety than any outburst of sorrow would have done. In all he said, there would crop up some allusion to old times and old occurrences, wherein Maude had borne a part, evidencing too plainly whither the current of his thoughts still flowed. By degrees he seemed to exhaust himself; at length he fell back wearily in his chair, and said—

"I'm tired of talking; and I don't believe either of you are listening to me. Dear Maude, once again let me hear you sing. I feel as if I

had a right to play the tyrant to-night. Sing, Maude, sing me something."

Maude rose up quickly, only too pleased to be able to gratify his wish, and went to the piano, saying—

"What shall I sing Arnold? You always like something gay."

"Not to-night," he answered; "I am afraid your gaiety would fail as woefully as my own has done. But I will tell you what you shall sing, Maude. You remember that fragment of Tannahill. He, poor fellow, died broken-hearted, and those four sad lines you have heard me repeat were found beneath his pillow, blotted with tears. I have often in my waking dreams endeavoured to realize his feelings, and in one of my melancholy moods I tried to finish his lament. *You* said I had caught the spirit of it. Sing that song now."

Maude sat down to the piano as requested. She had a rich mellow voice, and sang with exquisite taste and feeling. This night her voice

was tremulous, and there was even more pathos in her style than usual. Her whole soul seemed poured forth in the melody of the song.

“ Oh ! how could ye gang, lassie, how could ye gang ?
Oh ! how could ye gang, sae to grieve me ?
Wi’ your beauty and your art,
Ye hae broken my heart,
For I never—never thought ye wad leave me.

“ Oh ! why did ye gang, lassie, why did ye gang ?
O’ the simmer light o’ life to bereave me ;
Wi’ your een sae saft and blue,
Ye seemed sae fond and true,
That I never—never thought ye wad leave me.

“ But gang wha’ ye will, lassie, gang wha’ ye may,
Ye’ll find mony in the world to deceive ye ;
But, when ithers prove unkind,
Then, lassie, *here* ye’ll find
One sair and broken heart to receive ye.”

The song finished, Maude waited a moment to see if Arnold would ask for anything else ; but he did not speak—not even to thank her. Presently she turned round. He was sitting exactly where she had left him, his face bent forward and

hidden in his hands, but still and motionless as a statue. Not a sigh, not a word escaped his lips.

Mrs. Elmore pointed to the door, as though she wished to be left alone with her son. Maude quite understood her, but resolved not to go without a farewell word to him. She did not know how he would act when he had left his mother's house, nor when nor under what circumstances they might meet again, if ever they did meet again. She stole softly to his side, confident, however rapt his spirit might be, he would hear her voice.

"God bless and comfort you my dear, dear brother!" said Maude, gently. She touched his forehead lightly with her lips, and quietly left the room.

Arnold felt her touch and heard her words; he knew she was going, but he neither moved nor uttered a word until the door had closed upon her. Then, with a quick, sharp cry, he lifted his head and gazed with an expression of concentrated agony in the direction she had gone, as though his eyes could penetrate the oaken door and follow her

shadow beyond it. His pent-up feelings now broke through all restraint and burst forth freely. He believed he had taken his last look at his living love; and such grief as gushes from the overwrought breast over the grave of those whom we have cherished above all gushed now from his full heart at the grave of his lost love. Henceforth she must be dead to him, buried in the arms of another.

“Gone! gone! Lost for ever!” he cried, and his mother received him in her arms.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

ON the same day, almost at the same hour, that the painful interview between Arnold Elmore and Maude Vernon was taking place in London, one of a very different nature was taking place in Paris. A *fiacre* drove up to one of the principal hotels and a gentleman sprang out. He had no luggage, except a small valise, which he carried in his hand. Having entered, he asked to be shown to a private room, and then desired to see the *maitre d'hôtel*. In a few moments that gentleman stood before him. The traveller looked at him with a scrutinizing eye, and for a second seemed slightly embarrassed, as though he had some difficulty

in broaching the subject of conversation. At last he said :—

“I find myself in a very awkward position, monsieur, and in some measure compelled to burthen you with my confidence—a matter, perhaps,” he added, courteously, “that I can hardly regret ; for, judging by your appearance, I feel sure you will be a most discreet confidant.”

“Well, monsieur,” replied the *maitre d’hôtel*, with a slightly important and mysterious air, “I must say I have become acquainted with strange occurrences in the way of business, but no man can accuse Jacques Hauberdin of betraying his confidence or of refusing him assistance—that is, of course, in the way of honour.”

“Certainly, that is understood,” replied the traveller ; “and it is for my honour’s sake that I trust you now.” He paused a moment, sighed heavily, and cast down his eyes, but, recovering himself quickly, “I may,” said he, “as well come to the point at once. There are some matters so painful that they cannot be too briefly discussed ; and this

is one of them. The fact is, a lady, in whom I feel the deepest interest, has become involved with a money-lender—an Englishman, I believe. I cannot tell to what extent she is in his power, but I wish to save her if I can. I have been given to understand that she holds an appointment to meet him *here*, in this house."

"No, monsieur, no: you are misinformed," replied M. Hauberdin, eagerly; "no such thing has taken place here. I never——"

"Not yet," replied the traveller, unceremoniously, "but they will be here within the hour."

"Ah!" exclaimed M. Hauberdin, becoming greatly excited; "then they will come together!"

"No: they will arrive separately."

"And you wish——"

"To prevent the meeting—exactly; and I want to consult with you upon the best course to be adopted. I am anxious to arrange matters quietly; for if they become alarmed, or suspect that their movements are watched or known, my object will be defeated; and I would fain save the

lady's reputation, even from a breath of slander, for unhappily she is my wife. I must prevent their meeting, and the fact of the assignation must be concealed."

"How is that to be managed?" asked M. Hauberdin, placing his finger upon his forehead, as though deeply cogitating upon the matter, but in reality casting a suspicious glance upon his guest. After a slight pause, he added, "Well, monsieur, as you are the principal person concerned in the affair, all I can say is that I shall be very happy to be of service to you, if you will tell me how."

"You are very kind," said the stranger. "Well, when the lady arrives she will immediately ask for Mr. Chester: will you be good enough to show her in here to me?"

"Certainly—that is easily done; but suppose the gentleman should arrive first?"

"Why, show him into one of your upper rooms, as far from this one as possible."

"But as there are so many travellers arriving

here in the course of the day, how shall I know the one you mean?"

"Easily. His first inquiry will be for Madame Gautier : you will, of course, answer, she has not arrived yet, and request him to wait."

"But when he finds she does not come?"

"He will wait till his patience is exhausted, and then go away in disgust. But," added the guest, thoughtfully, "perhaps you had better find some means to detain him ; for after my interview with Madame Gautier I myself may have some communication for him."

"Ah! I see," exclaimed M. Hauberdin, eagerly : "you will arrange a meeting and shoot the villain."

"Or give him a chance of shooting me!" replied the traveller, smiling. "No, I don't approve of that common code of honour: if I am injured or insulted, I avenge myself. I would not give my enemy the chance of adding murder to his other crimes. In a case of duelling, the injured one as often falls as the guilty. No, I have no

wish to have a meeting of that sort with Mr. Chester; I hope to arrange matters differently. As I have trusted you with this delicate matter, I need hardly ask you to be discreet."

"You may trust implicitly to my discretion, monsieur. I will station myself at once and watch every arrival."

"A thousand thanks. I shall be glad to speak with you again, when my interview with madame is over."

M. Hauberdin left the room. The traveller sat, silent and thoughtful, in the chair into which he had first thrown himself, his head sunk upon his breast and his hands nervously clutched together. He seemed like one that knew he was playing a deep and hazardous game, but yet felt that he held the cards in his own hands. Still, if you could have looked in his face, as he sat there alone in gloomy solitude, you might have observed a nervous twitching about the mouth, telling plainly that his spirit was ill at ease. He listened anxiously, and started at every sound he heard.

At last a chaise rattled up to the door of the hotel. He held his breath and listened yet more attentively, but without moving, or even turning his eyes towards the door. First, came a low murmuring sound of voices for awhile, then a creaking noise upon the stairs, and in another moment the door was thrown open, and M. Hauberdin announced—

“Madame Gautier!”

There was a rustling of silk, a light tread, and the lady entered the room. The door closed behind her. Husband and wife were alone together. The stranger's back was towards her, his face hidden in his hands; he neither rose nor even turned round as the lady was announced, but kept his seat silent and motionless. Madame Gautier stood for a moment in the centre of the room, embarrassed and confused, almost bewildered, by her strange reception. She pressed her hand upon her heart, as though to still its beating, and then with an effort recovered herself, came forward, and stood by the side of the stranger. Laying her

hand lightly on the back of his chair, she said, in a low tremulous voice—

“Mr. Chester, my old, tried friend, I am so grateful to you. I would not have sent for you but that my mind is sorely distressed. I have been too long silent—the greater portion indeed of my life; now I must speak out or I shall die. This has always been a foreign land to me; I have no friend——”

The traveller slowly lifted his head, arose from his seat, and looked full in the lady's face. Their eyes met, and for a moment they stood and gazed upon each other in silence. The effect upon Madame Gautier was fearful to behold: every particle of colour disappeared from her face, her jaw dropped, her eyes became distended, and fixed themselves upon the face of the stranger with the terrified look of a creature held fascinated without the power of resistance. He was the first to speak.

“You have no friend, madame,” he said, ironically, “and you wander thus far to find one.”

He paused a second, as though enjoying her confusion, and then added, sternly, "How is it, madame, that, in defiance of my strict command, you leave your home?"

"My home?" she repeated, mechanically echoing his words, and keeping her eyes fixed with the same blank gaze upon his face.

"Yes; for it is your home so long as I will it shall be yours. You have written to a man who is my enemy, and arranged a meeting with him—here, in a strange house, and in a strange city." He struck his hand heavily upon the table, and exclaimed, "How have you dared to do this?"

"Because I was desperate and weary of living alone," she faltered: "always alone, and——"

"You send for Mr. Chester to keep you company. Really, madame, I had given you credit for better taste and sterner morals."

"My age should, and does, protect me from such a vile suspicion as your words imply, and you know it," she answered, indignantly.

"Age is no proof against folly," he said;

“people do not always grow wiser as they grow older. If you were young and handsome, I should have no difficulty whatever—a stranger might—in accounting for your movements; as it is, I own I am puzzled. I should be sorry to put a wrong construction on your motives, but it is difficult for me to arrive at a right one; I am only cognisant of a fact. I know that you have surreptitiously left your home,” he added, emphatically, “and have come here to keep a clandestine appointment; and here, where you expected to meet, perhaps, a paramour, you find your husband. It is no wonder you stand confounded. If this deed of yours, madame, were trumpeted abroad, it would sound ill in the world’s ears. A husband less complaisant than myself might find it difficult to forgive you.”

“What have I done,” exclaimed the poor lady, amazed at his cold, severe tone—“what have I done to deserve from *you* such grave reproaches?”

“What have you done?” he repeated. “You have exposed both yourself and me to ridicule and

contempt; you have disgraced my name. For it is well known throughout this place that Madame Gautier, of Beauvais, has an assignation here with an Englishman. Curious eyes are watching, anxious ears are on the alert, slanderous tongues are already busied in speculations. Unless *I* save you, you will go out of this house alone, leaving the dignity of the wife, the purity of the woman stained with slander."

Madame Gautier listened to her husband in bewildered astonishment. It was horrible to hear her conduct so darkly painted, so harshly condemned. He had spoken what would pass current for truth, yet it was truth distorted into a lie—a lie that seemed most natural, most easy of belief. "Is it possible," she thought, "that this one false step—if false it can be called—could be so cruelly construed?" A thousand strange thoughts flashed through her brain. She had not seen her husband for many months. Why and how came he here now? Had he been apprised of her movements? if so, by whom? She had long considered

her husband's servants as her gaolers; were they spies too? Had they set a watch upon her conduct, and at the least deviation from the common routine of her miserable life informed him of her movements? It must be so; in no other manner could he have traced her steps to this turning-point. It was terrible, and full of fearful import, this sudden meeting. Now, when she had hoped to cast off her chains for ever, she found herself doubly bound—threatened with exposure and accused of a grave offence, to which she had no power to plead “Not Guilty.”

Some women might have stood up boldly and proclaimed their wrongs and injuries with a loud and clamorous tongue, and have drowned the oppressor's voice in a torrent of reproaches and complaint. But Madame Gautier had no power to rebel; the suffering of years had done its work, and left her spirit crushed and broken. During her months of desertion and loneliness she had learned to dread her husband's return, and at last, guided by some unseen hand, she had left

her home, intending to put her affairs into Mr. Chester's hands, return to her sister, Mrs. Elmore—this was Mrs. Elmore's poor, misguided sister—and end her days in peace. While she was alone she had found courage to struggle, though feebly, with her fate; but now that her husband had risen up so unexpectedly, and confronted her with that dark lowering face, she seemed to feel his grasp upon her very soul. Would she never escape? She shuddered violently, and shrank even from his touch, as she exclaimed—

“How came you here? Was it chance or ——”

“No, madame,” he answered, “there is no such thing as chance: it is fate. I came here in the full expectation of meeting you; and I must say that, considering my long absence, your reception has not been the most flattering.”

“I would have gone anywhere, suffered anything, so that I were able to avoid you,” she murmured, as though following the bent of her own thoughts, rather than answering him.

“Again, madame, you are not complimentary;

but no matter. I can feel for your disappointment; and, in spite of this escapade, I am willing to escort you home."

"Home!" she repeated. "No: I have shaken the dust from my feet, and will never return again."

"How!" he exclaimed, elevating his eyebrows in seeming surprise. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to be seated," and he pointed to a chair, "and we will talk the matter over. You seem to have taken a very sudden and strange resolve. Seeing that a husband has, or should have, some voice in the arrangements of his wife, I take it unkindly that you have not consulted me; however, you will not consider me impertinent if I venture now to inquire what are your plans."

"Plans!" she answered, confusedly: "let me think: your voice distracts me. It is with that tone of mock courtesy, of covert insult, that you have made me suffer all my life. Reproach, insult me openly if you will, but no more mockery. Have done with the wretched past; let us speak plainly; for I hope, I pray that this may

be the last time we two shall ever stand face to face together again on this earth."

"Amen!" he answered, devoutly.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, looking earnestly in his face, "if you say 'Amen' to that, you will raise no obstacle, but let me go in peace. I will give you no trouble; I want nothing—I ask nothing. I came to you rich and happy: I leave you poor and broken-hearted; but I shall be content if I can once more see my native land and look my own kindred in the face. In that case I could die happy, and forgive you, perhaps, for all the evil you have done me."

"My dear Constance," he answered, smiling, "you are growing quite eloquent; in time you may become an agreeable companion." Then he added, slowly and emphatically, "I don't think I can afford to part with you."

"You will gain nothing by keeping me with you," she replied. "If you refuse to let me go, I will appeal to the law——"

"And the law, madame, especially after this

late escapade of yours, will give you back into my keeping. And do you know what I shall do? Well, it is no matter; I can keep my own counsel equally as well as you can keep yours."

"What shall I do! what shall I do!" exclaimed Madame Gautier, pacing the room distractedly, and wringing her hands. "My brain seems to wander; I have no longer power to think or act. So long have I been brooding over my miserable life, so long have I been alone and friendless, that at times I am not quite sure whether I am in my right mind."

For some minutes there was an unbroken silence. Madame Gautier paced to and fro; as it seemed, in intense agony of mind."

Ill-suppressed murmurings of reproach, mingling with a wild wail over her past, lost life, at length broke from her lips. It seemed as though the wrongs and sufferings of years now gushed tumultuously forth. The storehouse of memory was opened, and from every corner and chamber of her brain rushed distracted grief, or long-buried wrong,

all mingling confusedly in her thoughts and words.

M. Gautier seemed amazed at this sudden outburst from one who had hitherto borne so much, and for so long a period, in silence. He watched, however, and waited. He knew that the tumult now raging in her breast must soon subside, and a reaction take place. Meanwhile he was untouched by her distress, unmoved by her reproaches. He looked upon her writhing spirit as mercilessly as he would have looked upon the useless struggles of a bird that flutters and beats itself against its cage, and then sinks panting and helpless. Presently she paused from sheer exhaustion, and threw herself into a chair. She felt it would be vain to struggle against him; for he was legally her master. M. Gautier took out his watch, glanced at it, and said—

“In one hour, madame, we must start on our return home.”

Madame Gautier felt that the crisis of her fate had come; and, cowed by the stronger spirit of

her husband, her tone changed to one of deep humility.

"I know if you have determined to compel me to return, I must," she said: "there is no hope, no escape for me; but I entreat—I implore you, let us part. Why not? Why should we drag on this weary chain that galls us both? Let me go; it is better for us both that we should part. When the sea rolls between us, you may be happy and free. *I* will never cross your path again, will never remind you, by word or deed, that you have a wife."

"Well, madame," he answered, thoughtfully, "suppose I am equally as willing as yourself to break the tie that binds us, what would you do? Where would you go?"

"I would go to England, to my dear sister. She loved me once, when we were both young and happy; and I have no doubt she will receive me now. It was for that purpose I sent for Mr. Chester, that I might consult with him and make the necessary arrangements for my journey."

"If I were to agree to your proposal, how could I be assured that you would keep your word, and never trouble me again?"

She smiled bitterly as she answered—

"Look back upon the long miserable years that I have passed with you, and ask yourself if I could wish them to return?"

"You may know a worse fate than that of living with me."

"Never! I shall welcome any fate but that."

She looked anxiously in his face, and waited for his decision. After a few minutes' reflection, he answered:—

"Well, I agree. If I were the tyrant you hold me to be, I should insist on your returning to your duty. But I am inclined to be amiable. Your pathetic appeal has moved me; and, since we cannot be happy together, I am willing that we should part."

She raised her head and breathed a long, free, breath, as though relieved from a weight of years.

She was about to thank him, but he stopped her, saying—

“Stay! You don’t know yet how much you have to be thankful for. I owe a duty to myself as well as to you. I cannot in conscience part with you so unceremoniously as you seem to wish. For a few days, at least, you must remain with me; and, as soon as I have made the necessary preparations, I will myself escort you to England and place you with proper respect under your sister’s roof. Will that content you?”

“Oh, yes! yes!” she exclaimed, gratefully, clasping her hands, while a deluge of tears rolled down her cheeks. “I feel happier, nearer to Heaven now than I have felt for years.”

“Again you are not complimentary, madame,” he sneered, and a fierce light shot from his eyes.

“I warn you, it is hardly safe to exult so openly at our parting.”

“I will say no more,” she answered, timidly.

“I will only implore you to let there be peace.

between us for the last few days we are together."

"If there should be strife, it will be no fault of mine," he said. "But come, we had better leave this place, or we may attract more attention than is desirable."

He rang the bell, and M. Hauberdin quickly answered the summons. A glance of intelligence passed between them.

"I need hardly entreat you, monsieur," said M. Gautier, "to confine this unfortunate matter to your own breast; for I am sure that, from a natural feeling of delicacy, you will do so."

M. Hauberdin assured him he had judged rightly.

"When the gentleman you expect arrives," he added, "will you be good enough to inform him that Madame Gautier repents her folly and has returned home with her husband?"

Madame Gautier raised her head quickly, as though to contradict his assertion, or, perhaps, leave some more explanatory message for Mr.

Chester; but a look from her husband silenced her. She drooped her head again, and stood covered with confusion. M. Gautier whispered a few words in the ear of the *maître d'hôtel*, then offered her his arm and led her from the room, down the stairs, and out into the street, where he hailed the first *fiacre* he met, and desired the coachman to drive towards the railway-station.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. CHESTER'S ADVENTURES.

M. HAUBERDIN's curiosity was evidently excited. He followed his two strange visitors to the door of his hotel, observed their entry into the *fiacre*, and watched the vehicle till it disappeared out of sight. He then returned slowly and thoughtfully to his bureau, leaned back in his chair, and sat quietly cogitating within himself.

"I don't quite like the look of that gentleman," thought he. "I wonder what he's about? I almost wish I had followed him. But never mind! I shall know him again, whenever or wherever we may meet. Don't believe that story of the money-lender. Bah! some love affair, I'll be bound.

Madame is not very young, though. *Mais chacun à son goût!* She looks miserable enough, too, poor thing! And if she is in that black-looking gentleman's power, I pity her. I suppose visitor number two will turn up presently."

M. Hauberdin disposed himself so as to be on the watch. About one hour after the departure of M. Gautier and his wife, another *fiacre* drove up, and Mr. Chester, very much flurried and excited, got out of it. He was late, he knew that; and as he was always very punctual in keeping his appointments, he seemed much discomposed. He had had great difficulty in finding out the hotel; for he could not understand his driver, nor could the driver understand him. He had been driving half over Paris in search of the "European Hotel," as he persisted in calling it; and when it could not be found, he fretted and fumed at the driver, who merely shrugged his shoulders, and laughed in reply. The *fiacre* came to a dead stand in the Boulevard des Italiens; and a gendarme, or *sergent de ville*, who understood English, came to the

rescue. Mr. Chester told him where he wished to go.

"Ah! Monsieur means the Hôtel de l'Europe," he said, smiling.

"Exactly—the European Hotel. It is the same thing," answered Mr. Chester, excitedly. "I've been driving that into this man's ears for the last hour, but he won't understand me."

The sergent de ville gave the proper instructions to the driver, then politely bowed and passed on. Mr. Chester's ideal of an accomplished Frenchman ever afterwards became connected with that of one who wore a cocked-hat, who had a sabre by his side, and who spoke English. When the *fiacre* stopped at the Hôtel de l'Europe, our traveller could hardly persuade himself that he had arrived at his destination; but the appearance of M. Hauberdin, who came out smiling to receive him, and inquired if his name was Chester, at once reassured him.

"I'm afraid I've been expected some time," said Mr. Chester, giving an account of the troubles

and difficulties he had met with in getting to his journey's end, and ending with a few words of commendation of the polite gendarme. M. Hauberdin listened respectfully, and proved his attention by an occasional bow or assenting smile. At length Mr. Chester got to the end of his string of grievances; he waited for M. Hauberdin to say something in reply, but only then became aware that his eloquence had been wasted on an uncultivated Frenchman, who could not understand a word of the language he spoke. He was half inclined to rush out into the streets in search of another interpreter, but M. Hauberdin managed to make him understand that he would send for his wife, who understood English. Mr. Chester then named Madame Gautier. M. Hauberdin comprehended him perfectly now, and proceeded, in flowing French and untranslatable, broken English, to give him an account of Madame Gautier's arrival, the circumstances connected with her departure, and, with an eye to business, concluded by inquiring if Monsieur would like to dine.

All that Mr. Chester seemed to understand was, that Madame Gautier was not there, and that M. Hauberdin had thrown out a suggestion that he should have dinner.

"Would I like to dine?" he muttered. "Of course I should; first sensible word I've heard in France!"

Smiling his approval of M. Hauberdin's suggestion, and nodding his consent, our *maitre d'hôtel* retired to give the necessary orders.

Mr. Chester, left to himself in the *salle-à-manger*, began to think over his position. He seemed to imagine Madame Gautier had not arrived, and wondered at it; for it was already above an hour past the time she had herself appointed to meet him.

"I wonder if there ever was, or ever will be, a punctual woman?" he exclaimed, half aloud; then shortly afterwards murmured to himself, "Poor Constance, I dare say she is very much changed. I wonder if I shall know her?"

His thoughts flew back to the pale, spiritual

beauty of five-and-twenty years ago. He had had an unspoken tender feeling for Madame in those days. But he was only a poor struggling lawyer, with his way to make in the world; he felt he had no right to indulge in dreams of woman's love, so he held his peace. Sometimes he doubted if he had acted wisely in remaining silent; he had learned since then that there are worse evils to be endured in this world than poverty, especially when it is softened by mutual love and mutual trust. Experience had taught him this; he felt that if he had spoken then, she would not have been longing now to return to her native country, driven thither by distress and sorrow. Mr. Chester was not one of those who indulge in melancholy retrospections. The warm feeling he had once had for her had died away long, long ago; but he still entertained a chivalrous respect for the woman he had once loved. He was ready to do anything in his power to serve her.

His dinner served, Mr. Chester quickly despatched it, still no Madame Gautier arrived. He

could not understand it. He took her letter from his pocket, and read it over again to make sure he had made no mistake. No, he was quite right; her directions were explicit enough, he had obeyed them to the letter. Presently M. Hauberdin entered the room, accompanied by his wife, an excellent specimen of a pretty vivacious Frenchwoman; her black eyes were sparkling with suppressed laughter, as she informed him, in tolerably good English, that Madame Gautier had arrived, but had gone away again!

"Gone!" cried Mr. Chester, amazed. "It is true I am late; but when a man comes a journey of two hundred miles, he may surely have a little grace allowed him. Did she say at what hour she would return?"

"Return! Oh, no, monsieur; she will not return at all."

"And has she left no message?" inquired Mr. Chester.

"Oh, yes, certainly" (Madame had forgotten); "that is, monsieur, the lady herself left no mes-

sage, indeed she did not speak ; but M. Gautier, her husband——”

“Her husband !” echoed Mr. Chester, starting back, more astonished than ever.

“Yes, M. Gautier himself desired his compliments to Mr. Chester, and they were to say that Madame Gautier had repented her folly, and had returned home with her husband : those were the express words he requested should be repeated to Mr. Chester.”

“Repented of her folly !” muttered Mr. Chester, more and more bewildered. “I do not understand ; there is some rascality at the bottom of all this.” Then addressing Madame Hauberdin again, he inquired—

“Did the lady appear to go willingly ? Were there no persuasions required ? no gentle force used ?”

“Not that I am aware of, monsieur ; the lady heard her husband give the message, and certainly did not make the slightest objection to it.”

Mr. Chester was still more mystified than before. Suddenly he heard, or thought he heard, a suppressed titter; looking round, he observed that two or three waiters and a jaunty *femme-de-chambre* had quietly entered the room, and were evidently enjoying his discomfiture. Now, if there is anything in the world an Englishman especially dislikes, it is the fact of finding himself in an unpleasant position, which, instead of awakening sympathy, arouses laughter. Mr. Chester was no exception to the rule; besides, there was something in the expression of the faces which surrounded him that ill accorded with his British constitution. He felt angry, almost insulted.

"The grinning idiots!" he muttered to himself; but, calming his anger, he addressed Madame Hauberdin gravely, saying—

"Pray, madam, are those people—your servants, I presume—laughing at me? If so, may I ask what it is that so especially amuses them?"

Mr. Chester made his inquiry with so much

dignified politeness, that, for a second, pretty simpering Madame Hauberdin was abashed. She spoke a few words to her domestics, upon which they busied themselves arranging or disarranging the tables, evidently anxious to remain within hearing.

"I hope you will excuse them," said Madame Hauberdin, apologetically; "but really, the circumstances are so uncommon—they were naturally curious, and wished to see you, for Englishmen are not generally celebrated for that sort of thing."

"Celebrated for what sort of thing?" asked the astounded solicitor.

"Of course," added Madame, looking modestly down, "those little affairs will sometimes happen with *young* people; but at your age! Ah! monsieur;" she shook her head deprecatingly, "it was so extraordinary too, and so fortunate, that the husband arrived in time to save the poor lady."

Mr. Chester stared in blank amazement at

~~Madame~~ Hauberdin, who proceeded to expatiate upon the great respectability their house had always maintained, and a great deal more to the same purpose ; from all which Mr. Chester gathered the fact that her feelings of propriety had been outraged, by his appointment with Madame Gautier having been arranged to be held at her hotel. A dim consciousness then broke over him that his presence there was ascribed to some motive dishonourable to himself and discreditable to her. He was shocked that so base, so utterly false a construction, should have been put either upon his conduct or upon hers. Personally he cared little for so ridiculous a report ; it could do no possible injury to him ; and, had he not been so greatly astonished, he would have laughed at the bare folly of coupling him, a bachelor of fifty, with so great an indiscretion. What the people about him might think signified little to him ; but to Madame Gautier it might signify much ; perhaps prejudice her not only in the eyes of the world, but in the eyes of her husband. When

Mr. Chester thought of that, the matter assumed a grave important aspect. That which, at first, had simply annoyed him for his own sake, now distressed him for hers. He became evidently much agitated, and again addressing Madame Hauberdin, he said energetically—

“But, madame, you do not mean to say that you—that these people—that M. Gautier himself, believes that I—that his wife—that either of us came here with any motive but a strictly honourable one?”

“Well, monsieur,” replied Madame Hauberdin, half hesitating, “it is seldom a lady runs away from one man, who is her husband, to another, who is not, from motives that are strictly *honourable*.”

Mr. Chester reflected a moment; he saw that he stood at a great disadvantage. What could he say? Pshaw! he would say nothing; why should he attempt any justification at all to Madame Hauberdin? It mattered little what these hotel people thought. It was not likely

that Madame Gautier would ever return there again. He hesitated, however, for a short time, as to what course he himself would follow, and decided at length, that his duty, as a man of honour, was to see M. Gautier, and explain away any unpleasant feeling or misunderstanding that might have arisen; he also hoped to remove other difficulties that might have arisen.

"I think you said M. Gautier had returned home," said Mr. Chester, abruptly addressing Madame Hauberdin.

"Yes, monsieur," she answered, "that was the purport of his message to you."

"Then, if you will oblige me with a time-table, I will see how soon I can follow them."

"Follow them, monsieur!" exclaimed the lady, evidently thinking such an idea could emanate from no one but a madman.

"Yes," replied Mr. Chester gravely; "Madame Gautier must be set right in her husband's eyes. Her conduct or my own I shall not attempt to justify to you."

The train would not start for the town in which M. Gautier resided for three hours; meanwhile, Mr. Chester had time for reflection. He thoughtfully considered the unexpected difficulty that had beset him, and at last came to the conclusion that perhaps it would be as well not to see M. Gautier at present. If he followed them now, whilst the husband was inflamed with anger and suspicion, any explanation he had to offer might add fuel to fire; by his too great anxiety to do good, he might do harm; so he resolved to send at once, by post, a plain statement of the facts of the case, and to arrange so that his letter should arrive at Beauvais almost as soon as should M. Gautier himself. He called for pen and ink, and sat down to write at once. That plain statement of the simple truth he found was very difficult to put on paper, but in the end he accomplished it; he stated also, that in all he had done, he had acted in concert with the wishes of Madame Gautier's sister, Mrs. Elmore. The letter despatched, he resolved to start at once for

home; he speedily settled his account, jumped into a *fiacre*, drove to the station, and took a ticket for Dieppe.

The train was on the point of starting as Mr. Chester reached the platform, and he had scarcely time to jump into the first carriage he came to, ere the engine whistled and the train was off. As soon as he had settled himself comfortably in his seat, he turned to look at his fellow-travellers; there were but two, a lady and a gentleman. The gentleman was a remarkably handsome man, with characteristic-looking features; the lady was pale and careworn. There was something in her appearance, however, that interested him, a something that attracted his attention; in spite of himself his eyes kept wandering to her face; it was like a haunting memory to him. Once he fancied there was an indistinct, shadowy sort of likeness to the Constance of his early days. Could it be Madame Gautier?

Mr. Chester looked at the gentleman. If she were Madame, he must be M. Gautier. His

momentary thought died away. No such polite, constant attention could come from M. Gautier, the enraged husband returning home with a suspected wife. No, it was impossible. His assiduity was of too devoted a kind; he arranged her cushions, placed his valise for her to rest her feet upon, and if she moved, he seemed to anticipate her slightest wish. His voice was rich and musical, and when he spoke to her, which was always in French, it seemed to be in a kind and affectionate manner. The lady, however, submitted to these attentions without returning any thanks, nor did she seem to feel any gratitude.

Our traveller had proceeded about half way on his journey, and was fast becoming reconciled to the mistake he had committed, when the subject of his thoughts took off her glove, and raised her hand to arrange some portion of her dress. Mr. Chester's heart leaped! On her arm was a bracelet, the clasp of which contained a miniature of Arnold Elmore. The lawyer recognised it in an

instant, as well he might ; for it had been made under his direction, by Mrs. Elmore's request, and sent over to her sister, Madame Gautier, some two years back. He leant eagerly forward.

"Madame," he said, "pray excuse me if I am wrong, but is not your name Gautier?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, impulsively stretching out both her hands ; "I am—and you—you must be Mr. Chester. Ah ! forgive me for all the trouble I have given you."

There was a pathos in her tone, an imploring look in her eyes, as she uttered those few words, which deeply affected Mr. Chester. He glanced at the fine handsome man at her side, and wondered whether he were really her husband ; a moment's reflection convinced him that it was none other. Mr. Chester again found himself in a very awkward predicament ; an hour ago it had seemed easy to him to explain matters to M. Gautier ; now, when he was actually in his presence, and having discovered him to be such a different person from what he had expected, on

such amicable terms too with his wife, he really did not know what to think or how to act. Mr. Chester's silent embarrassment, however, was not of long duration ; M. Gautier set him quite at his ease by saying—

“My dear Constance, pray introduce me to your old friend, of whom I have heard so much.”

“Monsieur Gautier—my—my husband,” said the lady, languidly, going through the necessary form of introduction.

M. Gautier greeted Mr. Chester in the most friendly and genial manner.

“I am delighted at this most unexpected *rencontre*,” said he, “for, in addition to the pleasure I feel in being introduced to you, I have an opportunity of thanking you for your kind and prompt attention to my wife's request.”

Mr. Chester was amazed at the suavity of this address ; Madame Hauberdin's half-muttered, mysterious sentences, led him to expect a far different reception from M. Gautier, who seemed to have a perfect knowledge of the actual state of

affairs, and to take it more kindly than many husbands in his case would have done; for no man would like his wife to consult her solicitor without his knowledge; and in this respect Madame Gautier had certainly erred. Mr. Chester, however, was quite ignorant of her having expressed the intention of going to England with him; and in answer to M. Gautier he replied—

“It is always a pleasure to me to be of service to any of Mrs. Elmore’s family. Madame addressed me kindly, not only as a lawyer, but as an old friend, and it was doubly my duty to accede to her wishes.”

“I must own,” observed M. Gautier, in a slightly injured tone, “that when I first heard Madame had summoned you to France, I was half inclined to be angry. You must agree, monsieur, that a wife’s first and best confidant should be in her husband.”

This fact Mr. Chester could not deny; he bowed his acquiescence.

“Of course,” continued M. Gautier, “it is

quite natural that my wife should like to visit her sister in England, they have been separated so many years ; had she but expressed her desire to me, I should at once have granted it, and have escorted her to England myself, as I am doing now."

" Oh ! then you are going to England ! I am delighted to hear it ; I can promise you a hearty welcome from Mrs. Elmore, who has often bitterly lamented her long separation from her sister."

" I am afraid," exclaimed M. Gautier, " she has never forgiven me for having been the cause of it."

" She is not a woman to bear malice ; she will be only too happy to see you. I hope you may be induced to stay a long time among us."

" I am sorry to say I shall not," replied M. Gautier. " I shall merely place my wife beneath her sister's roof and return to France immediately. The loss of my wife's society will be a great privation to me ; but I hope she may get home-sick before long and return to me."

"No," replied Madame Gautier, "I shall never return to France. I shall be content to pass the remainder of my life beneath my dear sister's roof."

"And you will find yourself delightfully situated," observed Mr. Chester. "Mrs. Elmore sees a great deal of good company, and her ward, Miss Vernon, is a most charming girl."

"Judging from her portrait, she must be very handsome," said M. Gautier.

"No portrait could ever do her justice," answered Mr. Chester, warm in praise of his favourite. "It is beyond the power of any artist to paint the exquisite beauty of her face."

"And my nephew, Arnold, is very clever—is he not?" inquired Madame Gautier. While speaking of her far-off friends her manner became more animated.

"Yes, madame; and he is as good as he is clever. By-the-by, your visit will occur most favourably. Your nephew and Miss Vernon have been attached since their childhood; and I fancy you will soon have to claim her as your niece."

Our travellers conversed a little about Mrs. Elmore's family; then, by degrees, the conversation seemed to drift away from personal affairs and turn to general matters. Madame Gautier's interest ceased to be excited: she spoke little, leaned back in her seat, and became thoughtful and weary. M. Gautier made himself so agreeable, that he quite won the heart of Mr. Chester, who thought him one of the pleasantest companions he had ever met. In the course of an animated conversation, Mr. Chester said—

“I cannot recollect when I have enjoyed any gentleman's society so much as I have enjoyed yours, monsieur, even during this brief meeting. And yet, had I known you were in this train, I think I should have done my best to avoid you.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed M. Gautier, much surprised. “Why?—what evil tongue could have prejudiced you against me?”

Mr. Chester then gave him a humorous sketch of his interview with Madame Hauberdin, and the grave insinuations she had thrown out touch-

ing his coming to her hotel to keep an appointment of a romantic description. They both laughed heartily at the idea ; M. Gautier the heartier of the two. Turning to his wife, he said, with an expression of tender reproach—

“You see, my dear Constance, to what length your imprudent folly (you really must excuse the word) has exposed both yourself and me.”

She replied to him in French, which Mr. Chester could not understand. M. Gautier, leaning forward, said to him, in a low voice—

“Madame has been ailing for some time; so much so as to cause me serious anxiety. At times I fear her brain is affected. This summoning you from England is one of many eccentric acts she has lately committed.”

As M. Gautier finished speaking the train stopped.

“I think we have arrived at our destination,” said he.

“No: this is Rouen,” replied Mr. Chester.

“I thought you were going on to Dieppe.”

"Not direct," said M. Gautier. "I have some matters of business to transact here, but we shall follow you in a day or two."

In the bustle of alighting from the carriage they exchanged but brief adieus. Madame Gautier pressed Mr. Chester's hand. He noticed how damp and chill hers was. Nor did he forget its clasp for many a day.

"My heart's dear love to Caroline," said she. Then, lowering her voice, added, "Tell her——"

"Come, my dear Constance, come!" exclaimed M. Gautier, as he stood at the door waiting to hand her from the carriage. M. Gautier bowed, waved his hand, and he and his wife disappeared among the crowd upon the platform.

Mr. Chester was sorry to be so unexpectedly deprived of his pleasant companion. However, the conversation they had held together had given him ample food for reflection for the remainder of his journey. The assertion of M. Gautier respecting the state of his wife's health, had made many things clear to him which hitherto had puzzled

him very much. He could now better comprehend the wild mysterious letters at times received by Mrs. Elmore from her sister, causing that lady much concern and trouble; they were full of vague bitter complainings, making no direct charge against any one, but leaving much to be inferred. He thought of her last despairing appeal which had brought him over to France. She had announced her intention to fly from her husband, and never see his face again; yet there in the carriage she had been seated patiently by his side, and had never raised her voice to make a single charge against him! Of course, there must be something wrong about her, so Mr. Chester thought; no woman in her senses would act in so inconsistent a manner, and the sex seemed a greater puzzle to him than ever. Thus quietly cogitating within himself, he proceeded farther and farther on his way; he resolved, however, to do M. Gautier justice in Mrs. Elmore's eyes; she had evidently conceived a wrong impression of him.

Meanwhile, M. and Madame Gautier drove through the silent streets of the ancient city of Rouen; the night had closed in and a drizzling rain began to fall, which drove the inhabitants all within-doors. Dark, dreary, and shadowy, the tall houses seemed to fly past them; in the narrow streets, they appeared so close and threatening, that they looked as though they would fall down and crush the passengers. Presently they left the town behind them; Madame Gautier fancied they were driving through open country; she leaned forward and peered from the windows; she saw that they were going through a lane with hedges on each side, while fields and meadows stretched away into the distance.

"I thought we were to stay at Rouen," said she timidly.

"I have changed my mind," was the reply. "We are going on to Croisset. I think you will find the accommodation more quiet there than in the town—you are not anxious to attract observation."

"Is it far distant?"

"About half an hour's drive, not more."

"Shall we remain there long?" inquired Madame Gautier.

"Merely while I transact my business, which may perhaps occupy me two or three days," he answered.

"You are not deceiving me, Gautier? You could not be so cruel," said Madame Gautier in a half-timid, half-imploring manner; "remember, you have promised sacredly to take me home to England."

"And I shall keep my word. Really, my dear Constance, you seem to have grown more mistrustful lately; when have you ever known me to break my promise?"

"When have you ever kept it?" returned she bitterly; "you are like those cunning fiends who keep the word of promise to the ear, and break it to the hope."

"I thought we agreed to be pleasant companions to each other," said M. Gautier sternly,

"for the brief time we shall be together? You seem inclined to break the compact."

Madame Gautier made no reply.

They journeyed on in silence till they reached a small *auberge* in the village of Croisset. Here M. Gautier obtained the accommodation he required; he then assisted his wife to alight.

"Madame is very delicate," said he to the landlady; "will you be good enough to see her at once to her room, and give her every attention she may require?"

Madame Gautier shivered as she went up the wide stone staircase. Everything appeared cold and strange to her; there was an air of dreary desolation about all she came in contact with: gloom within—gloom without, gloom everywhere, except in that bright far-off spot, for which her heart yearned. She felt sorely oppressed. The landlady was almost officious in her desire to be of service.

"Perhaps, Madame, as she is an invalid, would like a fire—it is rather damp and chilly, although

summer time ; such disagreeable weather, too, for travelling. Has Madame come a long journey ? she looks so pale and fatigued."

To all these questions and remarks Madame Gautier replied in monosyllables. She was weary and tired both in mind and body ; she was not inclined to talk ; she wanted to be alone, and to rest. Accordingly she was soon left to herself.

When the landlady had departed, Madame Gautier took up her candle and looked round the room. It was large and lofty, with a tiled floor, a wide old-fashioned fire-place, and but scanty furniture, containing merely a four-post bedstead with heavy curtains, a large toilet-table, with a dilapidated looking-glass, and two or three chairs. The place looked desolate enough, and the one solitary light threw dismal shadows in the distant corners of the room. She had scarcely made these observations when the landlady again appeared, bringing a tray with some light refreshment, chicken and wine.

"Monsieur is so anxious about Madame," she

said; "he fancies her journey has overtaxed her strength, and begs her to take something, if ever so little, before she retires to rest."

"I do feel faint," answered Madame Gautier; "if you will be so good as to leave the tray, I will take something presently, but I need not detain you."

"Never a word of thanks to the poor gentleman who took care of her before he even thought of himself," muttered the landlady, as she descended the stairs.

Madame Gautier was, indeed, worn out, and faint from hunger and fatigue. Left to herself, she endeavoured to eat something, and drank a glass of wine, which greatly revived her, before she retired; this she did in a very short time. She wished she could sleep the time away, till she found herself beneath her sister's roof; she knew that could not be; but she resolved to try and wait patiently till the time for departure arrived. She undressed slowly, drew off her rings and bracelets, and placed them on the toilet-table, then

knelt down by her bedside and prayed fervently, commending herself into God's hands for the present, and for all time to come. She put out her candle, and then looked out upon the night. It was pitch dark; not a star was to be seen above, nor a sign of life below, except, far off in the distance, one solitary light which, gleamed, no doubt, in some lonely cottage window. She retired from the window, and crept shivering into her bed, in which she was soon sleeping soundly.

It was long past midnight. The inhabitants of the little *auberge* were at rest, when slowly and silently the door of Madame Gautier's room was opened, and her husband stealthily entered, carrying a light, which he shaded with his hand. He looked so white—so unlike his usually audacious handsome self, that even if Madame Gautier could have seen his face, she would hardly have recognised it. His footsteps made no sound upon the floor, and his movements were so noiseless, that he might rather have been taken for an unsub-

stantial shadow than for a living personage. He let down the curtains of his wife's bed—he might have spared himself that precaution—he had no fears she would awake. He glanced carefully over the dressing-table; his eyes lighted on the bracelets, whose clasps bore the likenesses of Arnold Elmore and Maude Vernon; these, with the few other trinkets she had worn, he secured. He then wandered round the room, as though looking for something he could not find. A sudden thought seemed to strike him; he thrust his hand into the pocket of his wife's dress, and drew forth its contents, among which was a pocket-book filled with letters; he took out the letters, and replaced the empty pocket-book. A satisfied smile broke over his face; his anxiety was removed, and he retired from the room as slowly and stealthily as he had entered it.

In the morning, Madame Gautier asserted that some person had entered her room during the night, and stolen some valuable jewellery, also some papers, which she valued still more. The

aubergiste was shocked at such a charge, but M. Gautier called him aside, and said—

“I did hope to keep my poor wife’s malady a secret, but I see it is impossible; in justice to you and your household, I *must* speak. The fact is, she has a mania for believing herself possessed of valuable things, which are constantly being stolen from her. Any contradiction renders her furious; pray sympathize with her—pacify her in the best way you can; tell her you will take the necessary steps for recovering her property, and she will rest content. We shall remain here, perhaps for some days, and I shall be compelled occasionally to be absent, when you will oblige me by keeping watch over her; a strict surveillance is absolutely necessary; yet,” he added, sighing heavily, “I am anxious to avoid any outward appearance of restraint.”

CHAPTER X.

IN THE CLOUDS.

THE morning after her decisive interview with Arnold Elmore, Maude Vernon remained in her dressing-room, and had her breakfast there. She did not wish to have another interview with him ; she would rather avoid a meeting than seek it, for it could only be productive of further pain to both. There was nothing more to be said or done on either side ; all was over, and any renewal of the subject might end in additional vexation. She resolved not to go down stairs until she was sent for. Mrs. Elmore was her son's most meet companion for the present.

Meanwhile Maude sat down and employed her-

self in writing a long letter to Raoul, who had requested her to address her letters to his own home at Beauvais ; she wrote, giving him an account, so far as she thought it prudent, of her interview with Arnold Elmore. The minutes and hours of the morning passed slowly and wearily on, as they will do when we watch their flight with anxious eyes ; the more we desire them to fly, the longer they linger. There was evidently great bustle and confusion in the house ; she listened, and heard the hurrying of footsteps to and fro, the hasty opening and shutting of doors, and the murmuring of voices. Presently she looked from her window, and saw the family physician, Dr. Wilson, drive from the door. Her heart sank within her—what was the matter ? why had he been summoned ? Could anything be wrong with Arnold ? Stirred by the impulse of the moment, she opened her door and rushed half way down the stairs ; there she made a sudden pause, for the drawing-room door at that moment opened, and Arnold himself came out ; had he raised his eyes

he must have seen her, but, fortunately, she escaped his notice. She watched his thin spare figure as he slowly descended the stairs, and went quietly then back to her own room, content now to wait patiently until Mrs. Elmore either came or sent for her to descend below. She had not long to wait. About mid-day Mrs. Elmore came to her, in no excitement or irritation; she seemed to have recovered from all anger now, and to be her old, calm, kind, quiet self again.

"I knew you would be anxious to see me, and hear how matters have ended," she said; "you did not wish to see my son again, dear Maude?"

"Oh no, indeed—it is better, far better, that we should not meet," she answered.

"I am glad you think so," continued Mrs. Elmore, "for he has just left me, and will not, I expect, return home for some few months; he was so excited last night, and so depressed this morning, that I was not quite satisfied about his health; I almost feared his brain was affected—he has had a sad trial." She sighed, and then continued, "I

resolved that Dr. Wilson should see him before he started. The Doctor says he has been overworked, and that entire rest, and change of air and scene, are absolutely necessary for him. He strongly advised his going abroad; new scenes and new faces would attract his attention, and consequently alleviate sorrow; so he has started this morning for Dieppe. He promised to write to me often, and I know he will keep his word."

After this conversation, Mrs. Elmore rarely spoke of her son, or alluded to his disappointment; she seemed rather to have banished the recollection of the latter from her mind, and never attempted to arouse commiseration for him. Perhaps she felt too hurt to permit herself to speak upon the matter.

Arnold meantime was on his way to Dieppe; he intended after awhile to visit Paris, that mart of pleasure, to which all lovers of excitement freely resort, and so few come away from unsatisfied. At first the way was weary, and dreary enough. A sudden darkness had fallen upon his path; he

was like one struck blind, and could no longer see the beauty and glory of the life he had pictured to himself, bravely and hopefully to battle through. Everything was shrouded in a gray melancholy mist, which his dim eyes had no power to penetrate, for sorrow's tears had veiled them. His soul was full of shadows, the ghostly memories of past hopes and unreturning joys; he could not rouse himself to shake off the gloom that oppressed and forced him to look on all things as through a glass darkly. He felt somewhat as Christian, that grand old pilgrim, must have felt, when he passed through the valley of the shadow of death. Was not he, Arnold Elmore, wandering through what was, to him, a valley of the shadow of death?—the death of earnest hope and heartfelt love.

In course of time Arnold Elmore's prospect put on a more cheerful and brighter appearance; the shadows grew fainter and fainter, until at last they rested on his soul like a thin vapoury cloud, and he could see the sun shine beyond them. Before him stood the future, pale and tear-stained

now, but full of consolation, laden with duties to be done, and fresh blossoming hopes to be gathered when the right season had arrived.

It is not in the time of trial that the truly Christian man shrinks and is afraid, or despairs and dies. When the battle is strongest, and the danger greatest, the good soldier stands firm, and contests his ground inch by inch with his enemy ; it is only when the war without is fierce and strong, and we grow weak and faint-hearted, that cowards will lay down their arms, reel from the ranks, and ignobly fly from the struggle ; brave men, bold and resolute, alone fight and conquer ; although they too often get maimed and wounded in the strife, still they have conquered and are content. Hard work it is sometimes—these life-struggles—especially when the enemy is firmly lodged in our own souls, entrenched within our deepest sympathies, and guarded by that wayward, wilful spirit, which prompts us to wrestle with and against our better self.

Arnold was a scholar as well as a Christian ;

he had not studied in vain the golden truths of those grand old master spirits of past ages, who stand giant-like upon the shores of time, pointing upwards, and teaching generation after generation to suffer and be strong. He thought and reasoned within himself, and manfully resolved to strive against the sea of despondency that sought to overwhelm him ; he determined to seek for help and comfort, and to permit himself to be consoled, for he knew that in some shape or other the angel Consolation was near him, as it always is, in the dark hour of sorrow, though some close their hearts and refuse to receive it.

Travelling slowly and leisurely, staying a day at one place and a day at another, and deviating only from the direct road according to his inclination, Arnold Elmore proceeded in pursuit of the object he had set before him. None but a morbid spirit can be insensible to the charms of novelty ; and the changing scenes, the ever-varying aspect of the country he passed through, and of the people he beheld, wrought a gradual but healthy change

in the mind of our traveller. As has been said, he was a shy, thoughtful student; he loved the companionship of books rather than the companionship of men, and lived in the past rather than in the present. On his journeys he had always a book for his companion; and as a consequence, as may be inferred, he rarely spoke to his fellow-travellers. He buried himself in the works of such men as those of whom Longfellow writes:—

“ The acts of great men all remind us
We may make our lives sublime,
And, when dying, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.”

Arnold had left London undecided whither he would go, or what route he would follow should he determine to go to France. When at last he had made up his mind to travel through Normandy, he took the boat for Dieppe. The day was calm and beautiful; the sun, high in the horizon, seemed to shine with an unusual brilliancy. The whole expanse of water was like a vast sheet of dazzling

gold, through which the vessel shot with a steady speed, the paddle-wheels throwing up sparkling showers, which cooled the air and created many-tinted rainbows in the glittering spray.

As Arnold watched the receding land, he thought he had never seen so exquisite a sight. To him, in his bitter sorrow, Nature seemed pleasantly to smile, and to give already a foretaste of her soothing power. His thoughts, however, like the smoke from the funnel of the steamer, still would tend landwards, bridging, as it were, the distance, which every moment increased, between him and those he loved best. Steadily plodded the vessel onwards: now gently tossing a fleet of fishing-boats lying at anchor with the waves from its paddles, or splashing anon some tiny yacht filled with a party of merry pleasure-seekers.

The steamer having arrived at her destination, Arnold, with a knapsack on his back, student-like, started on his pedestrian excursion. Passing through some of the less important towns, after a brief survey, he made the best of his way to

Rouen, that grand old town where the ancient dukes of Normandy kept such regal state. The quaint, picturesque city, with its gabled houses and narrow streets, and the peculiar dress of its inhabitants, presented quite a novel scene to our traveller. There was something in the solemn, old-fashioned grandeur of the place, with its magnificent churches and sweet musical chimes, that was strangely in harmony with his own soul.

It was late in the day when he arrived; and, having dined and engaged a bed at a hotel, he went out for a stroll through the town. The church bells were ringing for the evening mass, answering each other from tower and steeple, and steeple and tower, their melodious voices mingling with the air, penetrating the lowliest as well as the loftiest home, whispering to many a sluggish heart, "Arise and pray." The people were thoughtfully hurrying through the streets in answer to the summons—young and old, grave and gay; some old folks telling their beads or patter-

ing an Ave as they hastened along. Presently the bells ceased; the stream of people had flowed onwards and entered the wide, open doors of the cathedral; the streets assumed a solitary, deserted, and still appearance; but the stillness was soon broken by the solemn peal of an organ sending forth the swelling sounds of its rich music. Arnold stood to listen, and as he did so, vague shapes and visions of beauty floated through his mind and filled it with mysterious light. His spirit was soothed and softened; he felt more tranquil and at rest than he had believed it possible he could ever feel again.

That night the rich swell of the organ, and the musical voices of the bells, mingled together, and floated through his mind while he slept. He dreamed that he himself was a vast cathedral, and that his own spirit was the organ which sent forth peals of rich music. He imagined that his limbs had extended themselves into groined arches and graceful columns, and that his thoughts, like shadowy pilgrims, wandered up and down the

aisles, listening to his soul's music, and seeking rest ; while hooded monks and shrouded nuns glided to and fro in the gray misty light. Now a pair of glancing blue eyes and a golden curl appeared amongst the cloistered throng ; and when his thoughts pursued the rover, she was gone, faded into air ; again the shape crossed his path ; this time he seized and held it fast ; the hood fell back, the cloak dropped to the ground, the blue eyes and golden curl had gone, and he held a grinning skeleton in his grasp, which crumbled to pieces, and fell, a mass of rattling bones, at his feet ! Horrified, he awoke.

In the morning he rose early, and strolled out towards St. Catherine's Mount.

CHAPTER XI.

A CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE.

ARNOLD lay upon the soft greensward, and inhaled the pleasant breeze and the perfume of wild flowers. For a considerable space of time he remained in that position, indulging in dreaming fancies, pondering on the past and the present, striving to penetrate the veil which time and tradition have cast over bygone ages, and discover when the legendary lore ended, and truth began. The task was a difficult one, and the further his imagination went, the more bewildered he became. Meanwhile the sun rose higher and higher in the heavens, and dispersed the rosy mist that hung over the ancient city of Rouen, and wrapt it as

with a shroud, and the grand towers of the cathedral, and the tall church steeples, became dimly visible. Arnold took from his pocket a volume, which had recently been published—pictures of old England, written, strangely enough, by a German, but which contained, if not the most romantic, at least the most veracious, account of Joan of Arc, whose place of execution his eyes had that morning for the first time gazed upon.

The book, eked out by his own imagination, gave him a tolerable idea of the poor Maid's history, perhaps in its way one of the most touching and melancholy on record. No wonder one is unable to comprehend the mystery of her life, for it seems to have been a mystery even to herself, until the last. Insanity takes many forms, and that of religious fervour and patriotic enthusiasm is not the most uncommon. Whether the "Maid of Orleans" believed herself inspired by God, or was urged on and excited by the unscrupulous passions of men, matters little to us now: the effect was the same. She aided her country

in the time of peril, and was repaid with desertion and death ; her story has its moral, and to the end of time, her suffering, her enthusiasm, and her tragic death, must win the sympathy of all.

As Arnold lay there reading and reflecting, a dark shadow fell upon the grass before him ; he started, looked up, and saw standing by his side a stranger, who, finding he had attracted the student's attention, made some remark upon the scene before and around them, to which Arnold courteously replied. He was generally shy of making acquaintances, but there was something so irresistibly winning in the voice, the air, and manner of the gentleman who addressed him now, that he was by no means loth to continue the conversation which his new acquaintance, with the ease and grace natural to most foreigners, had begun. The latter threw himself on the grass beside Arnold, and in a few minutes they were engaged in an animated discussion on the progress of the arts and sciences, and the policy and government of their respective countries. The

stranger was evidently a man of extensive knowledge, cultivated intellect, and liberal opinions, and freely expressed his admiration of the English constitution, of which, he added, every Englishman ought to be proud.

"Yes," replied Arnold, "and, as a nation, we are proud of the constitutional government of our country. It has been the growth of centuries, built up by the wisest heads and sharpest wits of each generation. It has had its reformers and its martyrs, and it has them still. I don't mean to say that we tie them to the stake and burn them," he added, smiling; "but martyrdom has many stages, and persecution takes many forms."

"Then you don't consider your state is quite a perfect one?" interrogated the stranger.

"By no means," replied Arnold. "All men who think must see that it is anything but that. We see it ourselves every day, in the inefficient operation of our laws; we are continually destroying old statutes and ever forming new ones, according to the requirements of the age we live in.

I hold that, with us, as with all other countries, as the age varies and changes, so should the laws."

"That is exactly my opinion, and the opinion of most Frenchmen. In this country, if the rulers do not change or modify the laws, a revolution, which sweeps away both rulers and laws together, generally is the inevitable issue; and this we have experienced often enough."

However freely Arnold might speak of his own country, he was rather reserved in what he might say, when speaking of France to a Frenchman.

"Well," he replied, "your experience is not likely to be renewed at present. You have got one of the most able men of this age, or, indeed, of many past ages, on the throne of France. You are well governed now."

"You think so? Well, perhaps we ought to be satisfied. The Emperor has done a great deal for his country; he is certainly a great man: those who love him least are compelled to admit that much."

"He is not only a great, but a wise man," said

Arnold, "for he knows that golden rule, when to speak, and when to be silent. Many monarchs have known how to make war. He knows not only how and when to make war, but how to enable his own country to desire the benefits of peace. He has many ardent admirers in England. Centuries hence his name will stand high among the rulers of nations. He has made himself a name that is great in Europe, and which cannot but occupy a most glorious position in history. But it must be remembered he has had many advantages, which men who are born princes have been denied."

"In what way?"

"He has lived among the people as one of themselves, and not only among his own people, but among those of other countries; not, too, as a royal incognito, which is always a mere masquerade; for it is always well known when blood-royal beats beneath the domino, and the dose of knowledge is spiced, gilded, and administered accordingly; but Louis Napoleon, in poverty and

exile, has travelled through many countries and experienced many vicissitudes. In England he has lived for years, studying the principles of her laws and constitution, gathering knowledge and wisdom; of which you, monsieur, and your countrymen, now reap the fruits," he added, with a low bow.

"Yes, he is a genius, I admit, mechanically as well as mentally," replied the stranger. "I believe there is no public work carried on in Paris that he does not personally inspect; and we are told that his book on artillery and engineering practice is in general use in your military schools at Woolwich, monsieur. Is it so?"

"I have heard such a statement," replied Arnold; "still, I cannot vouch for the truth of it from my own knowledge. I know, however, that he gave great attention to the study of engineering and military tactics when he was in England, and I have great faith in his power of writing well upon that, or indeed on any other subject with which he is at all conversant."

“Yes,” sighed the stranger, as though loth to admit the fact, “he is certainly a wonderful man ; he has done more in ten years than another would have done in a century. It is a pity he is so unscrupulous.”

“Were he any other than he is, he would not long be—most likely never would have been—the Emperor of France,” returned Arnold.

“Well, on the whole, I suppose one ruler is as good as another?”

“Better,” replied Arnold, “when one rules well, and another ill. I believe that a nation is happier when curbed by a strong hand and wise brain, than when it holds unusual liberties through a weak and incompetent though well-meaning ruler. This latter will sometimes permit the spirits of a nation to run riot, and waste its energies in useless effervescing squabbles, unsatisfactory revolutions which the stronger will would prevent, on the principle of committing a small sin to escape a greater.

“I think you are right,” said the stranger,

smiling : " but you know we are all apt to quarrel with our best friends. I believe if the Emperor were to leave us, we should fret and fume till we had him back again. Let him give us a free press, and France would be satisfied."

" I doubt if you would long rest satisfied," replied Arnold. " He is too wise to do anything of the kind. A free press would be the ruin of France, for the variety of opinions prevalent in your country would create first, confusion, then doubt, perhaps discord and disunion. From one good thing might spring a thousand evils."

" Then, why is not such the case with you?" inquired the stranger, sharply.

" Because our nation, like our language, differs largely from your own. We are cold, unimpassioned, and not easily roused to action. The press is to us a safety-valve; and when our wrath is roused, or our liberties affected, we give free vent to our feelings, and are relieved; the valve is opened, the steam rushes forth, all ends in vapour: with you it might end in fire; you are more easily

excited, and quicker in action; a spark kindled might end in a general conflagration."

"Your conversation affords me much pleasure," said the stranger, courteously, after a moment's pause. "You seem to have a tolerably true estimate of our national character. Have you travelled much in France?"

"Very little. I have been to Paris two or three times; but that is saying little for France generally."

"Certainly. I suppose you are on your way to Paris now?"

"Yes."

"You will arrive at a favourable time. Paris is very gay just now, and, of all nations, I think you English enjoy its pleasures most."

"I am not in search of pleasure," answered Arnold, with a sigh. "I have not been well, and my physician has recommended me change of scene."

"Well, there is no change so thorough as that which you will meet with in Paris; but you don't

look altogether like an invalid. Perhaps you suffer from over-work, or over-excitement?"

"A little of both, I think."

"You look as if such were the case," said the stranger, scrutinizing him very closely. "You will not think my remarks impertinent, but I am a physician, and should be very glad if I could be of any service to you."

"You are very kind, and I am greatly obliged to you; but I do not think any physician can do me good. I must trust to time—that will work my most certain cure."

"Time truly can do much, but with assistance it can do more; and I think I can do something towards curing you; your nerves are evidently very much shaken."

Our traveller, of course, expressed his deep sense of the kindness of his new acquaintance, who, without any more ado, felt his pulse, and asked him numerous questions; he then took out his pocket-book and wrote a prescription, saying—

"Will you favour me with your name, that I may add it to the prescription?"

"Arnold Elmore."

"Arnold Elmore," repeated the stranger, slowly, as he wrote the name on the prescription. Tearing the leaf out of his pocket-book, and apologising for its jagged edges, he gave it to Arnold, saying—

"It is not very neatly done, but it will serve your purpose. There is an experienced chemist in the town; if you like, I'll walk down with you and get the medicine made up at once; the sooner you take it the better, for I am sure you will derive immediate benefit from it."

He slipped his arm through Arnold's, and they walked back to the city together, indulging in amusing chit-chat as they went along. The stranger told Arnold some quaint legends of the place, and odd anecdotes of celebrated people who had been born there. At last they arrived at the chemist's door; they entered the shop and had the prescription made up. Arnold observed that his

new acquaintance did not approach the counter, but kept as much as possible in the shade; he thought nothing of it at the time: small matters are seldom remarked till greater ones arise to give them weight.

"I would advise you to take a dose at once; when I see you again, you will tell me that the medicine has done you good."

Arnold followed the stranger's advice, and they left the shop together; at the corner of the street his unexpected benefactor raised his hat, wished him "Good morning," and they parted.

CHAPTER XII.

A MIDNIGHT JOURNEY.

For the rest of the day, Arnold confined himself to the precincts of the city, visiting such public buildings as most attracted his attention; he then wandered into a *café*, and afterwards strolled through the market-place, glancing curiously at the townspeople as they passed to and fro, vaguely hoping that he might meet his acquaintance of the morning. He felt he had been wrong in accepting the prescription, without offering the physician his fee.

Sometimes he fancied he saw the tall stately figure of the stranger in the distance, and hurried

forward, but only to find himself mistaken. In the evening he went to the theatre, often glancing from the stage, among the occupants of the boxes and stalls, for his friend, but in vain : he was nowhere visible. He returned home wearied and disappointed—disappointed at not meeting the acquaintance of an hour ! He was somewhat surprised at his own feelings, but in a foreign land, strangers will often meet and fraternise ; a courteous greeting sometimes speedily ripens into good fellowship, and at the end of an hour, they who were before strangers, become agreeable acquaintances.

Arnold, it must be said, felt very lonely as he wandered about the ancient city ; he did not care for the gay sprightly folk of the town who lounged about the *café*, but he would have enjoyed an interchange of thought and feeling with his quiet, grave companion of St. Catherine's Mount. Tired of wandering, he at length wended his way to his hotel, smoked his cigar at the open window, and listened to the wild snatches of gay songs,

the tramp of people's feet, and the echo of merry voices, in the street below, till, all becoming silent, he retired to rest.

The following morning he arose early, and as soon as he had had breakfast, again started off to St. Catherine's Mount. He had a presentiment he should meet his acquaintance there, and he wished to see him once more, to thank him for his kindness before he left Rouen, as he intended to go on to Paris the evening of that day.

He had scarcely ascended the steep ascent, and gained the top of the mount, when his new friend came forward to meet him, and, after the customary salutations had been exchanged, said with courteous kindness—

"I came up here, solely in the hope of meeting you, for I am anxious to know how my prescription has agreed with you?"

"Admirably!" exclaimed Arnold; "I assure you, I felt much better before an hour had passed."

"I was sure you would," replied the physician;

"I have prescribed the same medicine many times before, and have never known it fail."

"If all your remedies effect as speedy a cure as this has done," said Arnold, "you will soon be able to retire from active practice, presupposing, of course, that your patients make a better return for your services than I have as yet done. I take the present opportunity, however, of acknowledging my obligation to your skill, and of begging your acceptance of some slight remuneration."

Arnold took his purse from his pocket, and endeavoured to slip into the physician's hand a handsome acknowledgment for his valuable prescription; but his new acquaintance refused to receive it, saying—

"The physician's best payment is the recovery of his patient. One of your writers, I think, says, 'A wealthy doctor, who can help a poor man, and will not without a fee, has less sense of humanity than a poor ruffian who kills a rich man to supply his necessities.' Mind, I do not defend the morality of this."

"I should hope not," interrupted Arnold; "it is indefensible."

"I was about to say," continued the physician, "that I do not intend myself to stand for the wealthy doctor, or you for the poor man; we are both, I doubt not, above the generality in the circumstances of social position; but I wish you to believe that I am only too happy to have been of service to you."

Arnold expressed his thanks, and the physician continued. "Passing over the gratification I feel in having relieved you, I frankly admit that it is always a great pleasure to me to fall into the society of an Englishman, especially when, as in your case, he is both agreeable and well informed." He raised his hat, and gracefully inclined his head as he spoke.

Arnold declared that the benefit received and the pleasure derived was all on his own side.

"Well," answered the physician, "I am content that you should claim to have benefited from my assistance; but I must insist also on your company

having afforded me much pleasure. It is not often I venture to address an Englishman, for your countrymen, as a rule, are not socially inclined; they are naturally shy and reserved, and when travelling seem somewhat averse to entering into conversation with strangers."

"To a great extent that is the case," replied Arnold; "Englishmen themselves, too generally speaking, avoid even their own countrymen. I, for one, however, would rather seek than shun the society of foreigners. There is little advantage in travelling, unless we mix freely with the people; and I have always found it a great charm to talk to a well-bred Frenchman."

"You mean a well-educated one; for a man may be perfectly well bred, and yet possess little knowledge, and even that little he may not be able to impart to you. To be wise and learned are great advantages; but unless one is ready in speech, so far as companionship is concerned, there is small benefit."

"I agree with you," replied Arnold; "the

power of conversation is a great gift—one that few men possess.”

“Do you recollect what your great author, Dean Swift, says upon the subject of conversation generally?”

“He has said so many good things,” replied Arnold, “on so many subjects, that it is difficult to remember any one in particular.”

“He says,” continued the physician, “that one of the best rules in conversation, is never to say a thing which any one of the company can reasonably wish we had left unsaid; there can be nothing, therefore, more contrary to the objects for which people meet than to part dissatisfied with each other.”

“A theory which you, monsieur, carry out in practice,” returned Arnold. “There is one rule, however, I have always observed,” he continued, “and that is, to ascertain whether the person with whom I am conversing is most desirous to hear me, or to speak himself; if he be willing that the conversation should be equally divided,

then I endeavour to speak little and well, keeping in mind the fact that all men desire to be pleased, or at any rate to feel at their ease."

"A good rule, perhaps," returned the physician ; "yet I have never met with a man who speaks well, who at the same time speaks little. I must also admit that many so-called good talkers are tedious and wearisome, from a practice of exhaustively speaking of the matter in hand, and so testing the patience of the hearer."

Here followed a slight skirmish of compliments. One praised French wit, the other English learning, and Arnold complimented his companion on his knowledge of the English language.

"Yes," said the physician, "I understand it sufficiently to read and comprehend your best authors, both the older and more modern ; but in speaking the language, I fear I am sadly at fault, and I am really glad at this opportunity of exercising what little power I have ; for when the ear becomes accustomed to the sound of a language, we soon forget how to speak it."

"I should almost have taken you for an Englishman," said Arnold, "your accent is so good. It is only your extreme accuracy of grammar, that would have raised a doubt on the subject in my mind; for you seldom hear Englishmen speak so correctly, be they ever so well educated."

"My ear is very good, and that, perhaps, enables me to accentuate properly; my memory, too, is so retentive, that I seldom forget any word I have once heard. Still, I am by no means satisfied with my pronunciation of your language."

"You have no reason to be dissatisfied, monsieur," replied Arnold; "I wish I could speak French in every respect as well as you do English. I fear this will never be, or at least not for a long time; for, like most Englishmen, I think in my own language and translate into yours."

"That is a radical defect," answered the physician, "and you must endeavour to overcome it."

"A matter easier said than done," returned Arnold. "I envy the man who has a knowledge of

modern languages ; he has a great advantage over him who knows none but his own ; the latter must have but an imperfect knowledge of a people if he does not understand their language."

"Yes, that is quite true," said the physician ; "the study of language, generating habits of discrimination and analysis, has given a character to modern minds which our ancestors did not possess. It is utterly erroneous to represent such a pursuit as nothing but a criticism of words or an exercise of memory."

"I quite agree with you," returned Arnold ; "and without meaning to flatter yourself, monsieur, I may remark that a good linguist is generally a man of considerable acuteness and of superior taste."

"Be that as it may," answered the physician, evidently flattered at Arnold's words and manner, for he could see that the young man was speaking sincerely ; "of this I am sure, you must know a language before you can know a people."

"Should you travel much, you will find many

occasions for exercising your knowledge of the English language," said Arnold; "for you will find English quartered freely in all parts of the world."

"Unfortunately, I do not travel much," said the stranger, smiling. "As I have told you, I am a physician, and my practice confines me to this place from one year to another."

"Then you reside permanently in Rouen, monsieur?"

"Yes, I have practised here for many years."

"I am glad to hear that," replied Arnold. "I may hope to have the pleasure of seeing you when I again pass this way."

"You speak as though you intended to take your departure speedily."

"So I do. I intend to leave Rouen, and take the train for Paris this evening."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said the physician, heartily, "for I had hoped to have the pleasure of receiving you at my house. However, I trust the pleasure may be only deferred. There is my card, and if you are ever in the neighbour-

hood of Rouen again, perhaps you will pay me a visit."

Arnold took the card, and read the name and address; it was—

Dr. La Belle,

Rouen.

"I cannot ask you to pay me a visit to-day," continued Dr. La Belle, "for when I leave you I shall have a large number of visits to make. By-the-by," he added, halting abruptly, as though struck by a sudden thought, "you go direct to Paris, I think you said?"

"That is my intention at present," replied Arnold.

"Well," exclaimed Dr. La Belle, "you have expressed a desire to oblige me. You can do so now, if you will be so kind."

"Willingly," replied Arnold, pleased at the idea of being able to serve his new acquaintance. "Whatever commission you may have in Paris I shall be most happy to execute it."

"It is not a very difficult one," replied Dr.

La Belle. "I will state the case briefly to you. The fact is this: One of my patients, a very wealthy lady, has been staying at my house for the last two months. She is not exactly insane, but her nerves are in a highly excitable, disorganised state. She is full of nervous fancies, and it is necessary she should be humoured. For the last two days she has expressed a strong desire to return home to her friends in Paris. To-day she is so restless and excited that I feel she ought to go. I had intended so to arrange my affairs to-day that I should escort her to Paris to-morrow; but even were I able to manage matters in this way, it would be at very great inconvenience to myself. The favour I have to ask of you is, that you will escort her in my stead."

Arnold was taken aback by the nature of the favour required of him. He felt in no mood to make himself agreeable to a lady. He would rather have avoided the sex altogether. It was an odd request, he thought, for a stranger to make. The adventure seemed to be thrust upon

him, and without seeming churlish he could not refuse to accede to it. He gathered from the doctor's statement that he was required to be the temporary guardian of a lady, who, if not altogether insane, was at any rate to some extent so. It was a peculiar position for him to be placed in certainly. The doctor noticed his hesitation, and, seeming to mistake the cause, said, smiling—

“The lady is neither very young nor very handsome : you need not be afraid of temptation : you will be quite safe.”

“It was not of the lady I was thinking, but of myself,” replied Arnold. “I doubt if I should be a worthy representative of you, her kind physician. I am quite ignorant of and unaccustomed to the treatment of invalids. The lady may require more attention than I, in my ignorance, have power to give her.”

“There is no fear of that,” replied Dr. La Belle. “She is a very quiet, ladylike person, and will give you no trouble whatever. Of course, if I thought there was the slightest necessity for my presence,

no consideration would prevent my accompanying the lady myself, but there is none. I would have asked this favour of no one but an Englishman, and from our cordial though brief acquaintance I thought I might venture to ask it of you. If I have done wrong, I can but ask your pardon."

"By no means, monsieur. I shall be most happy to carry out your wishes," exclaimed Arnold, warmly. "Believe me, it was solely on the lady's account I seemed to hesitate, not upon my own. I shall be very happy to take charge of her; and, if you will give me your directions concerning her arrangements, I will fulfil them to the letter."

"You are very kind. I shall rely on you implicitly. By what train do you think of starting?"

"I intend to go by the mail-train, which passes through Rouen about one o'clock, I believe, in the morning; but I am not quite sure of the hour; the time-table, however, will give it correctly. I am afraid that will be an unreasonable time for a lady to travel," continued Arnold,

indulging in a hope that the inconvenient hour might be objectionable for an invalid lady to encounter; "but, for reasons which I need not explain, I am unable to arrange for any other train."

"Umph! well, perhaps it is rather inconvenient," replied Dr. La Belle, thoughtfully; "but I dare say we shall be able to manage it; at any rate, I will endeavour to do so. If possible, we will meet you at the station about a quarter of an hour before the train starts; should we, however, not be there, you will conclude that some unforeseen accident has detained us, and you can proceed to Paris, carrying with you my sincere thanks for your willingness to oblige me." They shook hands cordially, and, with the usual expression of farewell, parted.

Dr. La Belle returned home to make arrangements for his patient's journey; Arnold returned to his hotel to make preparation for departure. This finished, he took from his pocket a diamond edition of Dante, and was soon lost in the sublime imagery of the poet, as he waved him from

hell to heaven, through human misery to the joys and hopes of the church triumphant.

Arnold himself was a worshipper of the sacred Nine. He felt that poetry was a truth that God had sown over the earth, like daisies glowing in the sun-light; that a poet ought to be a true poem—a composition and pattern of the best and most beautiful things; not presuming to sing high strains of heroic men, or famous cities, unless, in himself, he has the experience and the practice of all that is great and noble; and he ever remembered the iron chair of Pindar, in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, on which sat the Pythagorean bard, when singing his lofty hymns in honour of the gods.

After he had been some time immersed in the pages of Dante, he arose and went out. He strolled through the city, paid a visit to the wonderful church of St. Ouen—perhaps the most perfect gothic edifice in the world—and wandered about the picturesque structure and its mysterious aisles, repeating Byron's beautiful words as he

gazed about on the shrines, relics, and holy altars—

“ Through the dim gothic glass of pictured saints,
Casements, through which the sun-set streams like
sun-rise
On long pearl-colour'd beards, and crimson crosses,
And gilded crosiers, and cross'd arms and cowls,
And helms, and twisted armour, and long swords ;
All the fantastic furniture of windows,
Dim with brave knights and holy hermits, whose
Likeness and fame alike rest on some panes
Of crystal, which the rattling wind proclaims
As frail as any other life or glory.”

Leaving this beautiful church, he passed the end of the street where Dr. La Belle resided. He decided to walk down it, to take a look at the house. He had no difficulty in finding it, for there was a large brass plate on the door, with “Dr. La Belle” engraved upon it. It was a handsome house, and looked like the residence of a man in unquestionably good practice. More than once, as he stood gazing on the house, he felt inclined to pay him a visit, and make some excuse for leaving Rouen by an earlier train, and thus

get rid of a charge he had promised to undertake ; for it seemed to hang over him like a funeral pall. A moment afterwards he upbraided himself for being a coward ; he had agreed to perform a strange duty, and he felt that he was bound to go through with it and fulfil it honourably, notwithstanding any personal inconvenience to himself. He was certainly under an obligation to Dr. La Belle, and the trivial favour the latter asked as a return for that obligation was one which none but a churl could refuse. He would, therefore, return to his hotel, and wait patiently the hour of departure. As the hour approached, his disinclination increased. He was angry one moment for having so soon picked up an acquaintance, and the next he felt ashamed of himself.

In due time, valise in hand, Arnold made his way to the station. When he reached the platform he anxiously looked round for the doctor ; he saw no one like him. There weré but few persons awaiting the train, and certainly Dr. La Belle was not among them ; he was convinced of

that. He looked at his watch; it was exactly a quarter of an hour before the train would start. He walked briskly up and down the platform, watching with intense interest every fresh arrival. As the time of starting approached, the number of passengers increased. Arnold again looked at his watch: it wanted but ten minutes; Dr. La Belle was five minutes behind the time appointed. The hope that they would not come filled his breast. He turned to take a last hurried glance around him before he entered a carriage. He saw no one; his heart bounded with delight, and he exclaimed to himself, "Thank God! the doctor has not kept his appointment." As he laid his hand on the handle of the door to take his seat, he felt a gentle tap on his shoulder; he looked round; it was Dr. La Belle; near him was a lady closely veiled. Their appearance had been so sudden, it seemed as though they had sprung out of the ground.

"This is the gentleman of whom I have spoken to you," said the doctor, in a low tone to the

lady ; she bowed slightly to Arnold, as he raised his hat, and said, "I shall be more than pleased, madame, if I can render you any service during the journey."

Arnold was not sure that she understood him, as he spoke but indifferent French ; for she made him no reply, but looked at him, at first carelessly, then with more interest, as she exclaimed, half-aloud, "Can my eyes deceive me ? how like he is."

Dr. La Belle seemed somewhat discomposed, and immediately whispered something to her in a very earnest manner. The lady shivered ; and Arnold could not help hearing a few wandering broken words from her. "For ever, yes ! I hope it may be for ever—it is a very long passage ; I hope it will be calm, I so dread the sea."

Arnold was half-inclined to assure her that they were not going on the sea ; but on reflection he thought he had better be silent ; he remembered that Dr. La Belle had intimated to him that his patient occasionally suffered from mental halluci-

nation. • Dr. La Belle, drawing Arnold aside, said—

“I have engaged a *coupé* for you and Madame, in order that you may not be inconvenienced by disagreeable travelling companions. Here is her ticket, and a billet to show, if necessary, that the *coupé* is yours for the whole journey; here is also her purse, in case she should require anything before she arrives in Paris; it is always well to be prepared for all emergencies. I have mentioned, I think, that my patient suffers from extreme excitability: this is followed invariably by faintness; should this occur, will you be kind enough to give her a few drops of this tincture on a lump of sugar? it will act as an immediate restorative.”

He gave him, as he spoke, a small phial closely corked, and an envelope containing a few lumps of sugar. Arnold promised to obey all his instructions, and inquired where he was to convey the lady on their arrival at Paris.

“Oh, she will be of no further trouble to you.

I forgot to tell you that I have telegraphed to Paris, and desired her carriage to meet you there ; inquire for it by the name of Madame Santron."

"Very well," replied Arnold ; "I dare say I shall have no difficulty in finding it. We had better take our places now, for in two minutes we start."

"There is no hurry," said Dr. La Belle ; and as he returned to the lady's side, he whispered to Arnold, "Would you have any objection to walk to the end of the platform, while I seat her in the carriage? Poor thing! she is slightly paralysed in her lower limbs, and is very shy and nervous ; she has some little difficulty in lifting her feet to the step, and does not like to be noticed."

Arnold quite understood the poor lady's delicacy : it was only natural ; and accordingly he walked away. On his return to the carriage, the bell rang for the train to start. The lady was already seated at the farthest side ; on the next seat to her was a basket of very beautiful flowers. Arnold, of course, was to place himself in the seat

next the door. Dr. La Belle kept his hand upon the door, and engaged Arnold in close conversation until the very last moment arrived for the departure of the train; they then shook hands, and, as Arnold jumped into the carriage, he almost started back, powerfully affected by an unpleasant odour that pervaded it.

"I have had an accident, and broken a bottle of eau-de-Cologne," said the doctor; "and, as some gentlemen have been smoking in the carriage, I am afraid the two perfumes blended together are disagreeable."

"It is of no consequence," said Arnold, seating himself; "the smell will soon go off: I shall keep this window open."

The last word had hardly left his lips when the train started; Arnold looked from the window and beheld Dr. La Belle waving his adieu. Once or twice during the journey he made an attempt to converse with the lady; he felt himself in duty bound to be agreeable, and to lighten the journey as much as possible; but she made no response to

his endeavours, and he thought that perhaps she did not understand his bad French, or perhaps she did not hear him, for she kept her veil closely drawn; she was leaning back in the carriage, very quiet and still.

"She is evidently weak and overtired," thought Arnold, "and seems inclined to sleep: very wise of her too; it is a bad time for an invalid to travel; but after all she won't be cheated of her night's rest."

The journey proceeded quietly and swiftly; whenever it was necessary, Arnold showed the two tickets, and the train went on again. They met with no adventure, and Dr. La Belle's precautions were in vain: the restorative tincture was not once required. Arnold felt alone, yet not alone, during his journey with his one strange and silent companion, and he was not sorry when it was ended and they arrived at Paris. He turned to his companion politely, and said,—

"We have had a silent journey, madame, but it is ended now; if you will remain here, I will look

for your carriage;" and without waiting for her reply he sprang on to the platform. He went at once to make inquiries for Madame Santron's carriage: it was nowhere to be found; and, after spending some time in a fruitless search, he came to the conclusion that there had been some mistake respecting the telegram. He then turned to make his way back to the carriage where he had left the lady, intending to take her instructions, if she had intelligence enough to give any, as to her conveyance home.

As he approached the *coupé* he observed a throng of people surrounding it, among them some railway officials. A grave-looking, portly gentleman got out of the *coupé* as he approached it, and spoke mysteriously in an under-tone to a sergent de ville who stood close by.

"Perhaps the lady has fainted," thought Arnold, and hurried forward to assist her. They all made way for him. The sergent de ville touched him on the shoulder, and pointing to the *coupé*, said—

"Did you get out of that *coupé*, monsieur?"

"Yes; not five minutes ago."

"And you travelled with a lady?"

"Certainly I did, from Rouen. Why do you ask that question?"

"And has there been no other person travelling with you? Have you been quite alone during the journey?"

"Yes, entirely alone. No one has even attempted to enter the carriage. Why do you ask?" said Arnold, getting strangely excited as he looked at the grave, curious faces round him.

"Not for a single stage?"

"Not for a second. Neither have I left the carriage for a single moment until now."

"Are you aware, monsieur, that the lady is dead?" said an impressive voice at his side. The gentleman who spoke was the physician who had just left the carriage.

"Dead! good Heavens!" cried Arnold, starting back, for a moment paralyzed by the word.

"Poisoned, monsieur, and has been dead some hours."

"Poisoned? horrible!" exclaimed Arnold, shuddering, and helplessly bewildered, for the sergent-de-ville still kept his hold upon him.

His breath came short and thick; it was like a dream, only more terrible than a dream had ever been. Could it be possible that he had taken a midnight journey with the dead? Perhaps he had been drowsily dreaming while the spirits of Life and Death were struggling together by his side. Had the poor lady uttered a single cry, or moved, even to stir a single limb, he must have heard her. His thoughts travelled back with the speed of lightning through every moment of that eventful journey; he remembered at certain points how the engine screamed and the wind soughed, and seemed to creep sighing through every crevice of the carriage. Then at one time he turned suddenly cold and shivered, and drew his rug closer round him. Could that chill feeling have been a shrinking of nature, a convulsion of mor-

talities as its mortal foe smote its victim in secrecy and silence? or, it might have been the dead woman's spirit floating past that fanned his cheek and made his flesh creep with that peculiar chillness, such as is sometimes felt in the height of sunshine, when we shiver and say superstitiously that some strange foot is treading on our grave. In vain he racked his brain to discover at what precise time, when, and how her spirit had taken flight. He stood there upon the platform in mute bewilderment—heard the fiery monster snort and whistle as though anxious to be off again. In spite of the early hour of the morning a numerous crowd surrounded him. Those who had arrived by the same train, with the railway officials and porters, gathered round the spot, awestruck and amazed, for the tale had spread like wildfire from one to another. It was strange; but wherever he turned his eyes he met no glance of sympathy—not one. All seemed to gaze sternly upon him, threatening and dark. What could it mean?

The body of his travelling companion was taken

from the carriage, and, for the present, conveyed to the waiting-room. The veil was raised from her face, and the full gleam of the gas-light fell upon it. It was too evidently cold and rigid in death. The eyes were wide open, glassy, and expressionless. Arnold shuddered; they seemed to be fixed on him. He gazed upon the dead face with an expression of fixed, agonized fascination; he could not withdraw his eyes.

“Like, very like!” he murmured. He took a step nearer to the corpse, and scrutinized it more closely. “Good Heavens! my mother!” he exclaimed, staggered, and fell insensible to the ground.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

ARNOLD's exclamation, as he looked upon the dead body of the lady, sent a thrill, like an electric shock, through the hearts of all who heard it; they pressed eagerly around him, waiting for his recovery, anxious to know what light he could throw on the mystery that surrounded him. The general curiosity, however, could not be gratified; for, long before he recovered, the room was cleared, and no one remained with him but the police, the doctor, and the corpse of the lady. He lay for some time in a dead swoon.

When Arnold was sufficiently recovered and collected to talk, he expressed his willingness to

afford them every information in his power. A gentleman whose manner and appearance bespoke him a man of authority, addressed him, and, taking a note-book from his pocket, wrote down all the answers that were given to his inquiries. M. Herchel—for that was his name—having put the usual questions as to name, address, profession, and country, then asked for Arnold's passport, and looked to see how far it corresponded with the account he had given of himself; then, pointing to the dead lady, asked if she was his mother. On answering in the negative, he was requested to explain the words he had uttered before he had fainted.

"I was bewildered when I made the exclamation; but I was struck by the likeness between my mother and the deceased," answered Arnold; "and though I can now swear, thank Heaven, that the poor lady is not my mother, yet the similitude in every line of the face, and in every feature, is so startling, that I can scarcely tell in what particular they differ one from the other."

"You travelled with her from Rouen, I think you said?"

"I did, and during the whole journey I never left my seat."

"Was there any other passenger in the carriage besides you two?"

"None. As I have said before, we were alone the whole way," replied Arnold.

"May I ask if you were chance companions, or acknowledged friends?"

"Oh, no! we were neither the one nor the other. The deceased lady was intrusted to my charge by Dr. La Belle, a medical practitioner at Rouen, who, being necessarily much occupied with his patients in that town, requested me to escort her to Paris, where, he said, I should find her carriage awaiting her. On arriving here, as I have already said, I went to look after her carriage, leaving her, as I supposed, quite well; to find her dead was as great a surprise to me as to yourself."

"Do you know nothing more of her than what you have just stated?"

"Nothing more." Arnold wondered why they all looked at him so strangely. Could they doubt his word? Surely not. What motive could he have in speaking anything but the truth? He was a stranger in a foreign land; he knew nothing of their customs, nor of their mode of dealing with such a matter as this before them. There is a saying, "that none but the guilty need be afraid;" but Arnold Elmore, innocent though he was, began to feel nervous and sick at heart beneath this cool system of cross-questioning.

M. Herchel conversed for a few minutes aside with the physician; then addressed Arnold again—

"Did you hold any conversation with her during your journey?"

"None whatever. I addressed her once or twice, but she made no answer."

"Did that not strike you as strange? I should have thought her silence and stillness alone would have raised your suspicions that all was not right."

"Not particularly so ; for, as you must perceive, I speak but indifferent French, and I thought it possible that she did not understand me ; or, being an invalid, she was too ill and weary to reply to my questions."

"Then you knew she was an invalid ?"

"Certainly. Dr. La Belle informed me of that fact. Perhaps it would be as well that I should tell you the brief story of my acquaintance with him, as that will best account for the lady being in my charge."

"Proceed," said M. Herchel ; "I shall be glad to hear anything that can explain this most strange mystery."

Arnold, in as few words as possible, gave an account of his first meeting Dr. La Belle on St. Catherine's Mount, near Rouen, and of the progress of their brief acquaintance, until it terminated at the Rouen railway station.

"This is, indeed, a strange story," said M. Herchel, with a slightly incredulous look.

"It may be strange," answered Arnold, some-

what haughtily, for he felt annoyed at the official's look and tone of incredulity; "but it is nevertheless true. I am an Englishman, and I would scorn to lie, especially on so slight a matter."

"The murder of this unhappy lady can hardly be called a slight matter," replied M. Herchel, sternly. "You, at least, may find it no slight matter."

Arnold shuddered at the word murder, and explained that he was not alluding to her, but to his acquaintance with Dr. La Belle.

"Pardon me, monsieur," returned M. Herchel, "but I misunderstood you. I have no wish to annoy you more than I can help, though it is impossible for me to perform my duty without giving you some pain. I will, however, be as tender as possible. Have you any objection to be searched?"

"Certainly not; pray search me as minutely as you please. Here is the key of my port-manteau."

With systematic coolness they proceeded to search his person. His coat-pockets were turned out, one after the other. He had nothing to conceal, nothing to fear, and submitted with gentlemanly grace to the unpleasant process. They next examined his waistcoat pockets, and drew therefrom first a lady's purse, then a small packet of loaf sugar, next a phial of tincture, the restorative which Dr. La Belle had requested him to administer to his patient in case of need. Without a word, but with a singularly impressive look of inquiry, M. Herchel handed the phial to the doctor in attendance. The latter examined it, and said quietly—

“Prussic acid, and the lady has been poisoned with prussic acid. There has been taken from this bottle just sufficient to kill one person—no more, no less.”

Arnold looked from one to the other in mute amazement, half stunned. A poison, of which the lady had died, had been found on his person! It was horrible! What could it mean? He saw

from their faces that they thought he had administered it to her—that *he* had killed her! His tongue seemed cloven to his mouth, as though paralyzed. He remembered now the extraordinary odour he had noticed on entering the carriage at Rouen, and for which Dr. La Belle had accounted by stating that he had broken a bottle of perfume.

"For Heaven's sake, gentlemen," he exclaimed, looking eagerly round him, "do not suspect me. You cannot think that *I* poisoned her."

"Well, monsieur," replied M. Herchel, gravely, "I must admit the case is full of suspicion. I am afraid you will be compelled to *prove* that you did not."

"That is easily done," said Arnold. "Dr. La Belle will exculpate me at once."

"And implicate himself!" said M. Herchel, with a slight curl of his lip. "It is evident from your own story, monsieur, that either Dr. La Belle or you are guilty of the death of the unfortunate lady."

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Arnold; "that is impossible. I can call God to witness that I am innocent. There has, there must have been, some disastrous mistake. You remember, Dr. La Belle told me the lady was an invalid, and he may have given her the prussic acid as a medicine: he never could have poisoned her intentionally. It is impossible. I will go back to Rouen by the next train, and see him. I have no doubt he will be able to make clear this dreadful mystery."

"And if you will permit me," said M. Herchel, politely, "I will first accompany you to the Préfecture de Police. Do not be alarmed, monsieur; it is a mere matter of form, nothing more. It is necessary that this extraordinary story you have told me should be registered, or, in other words, that your deposition may be officially taken, and the orders of the Préfet, respecting you received and carried out."

Before M. Herchel carried Arnold Elmore to

the Préfecture, he directed that the body should be conveyed to the Morgue, the place to which the bodies of unknown persons, who have met with accidental death, are carried for the purpose of identification. They then entered a *fiacre*, and drove to the Préfecture de Police.

What a strange, changed aspect Paris bore to Arnold now, compared to what it had ever done before! He had visited the gay, grand city often, had wandered through its animated streets and incomparable boulevards, with a light heart and a light step, Maude's bright face glowing with pleasure by his side, glancing around here, there, and everywhere, making quaint observations, and casting admiring eyes and laughing looks on all sides, her bright spirits adding to the brightness of the scene, and making it indeed one of enchantment to him. That was all over now; the enchanter's wand was broken, the spectacle had faded away. He could never look again with the same eyes upon the scenes through which he had

wandered with her; they would no longer glow with the rich rainbow hues of hope, youth, and love.

A dull gray mist seemed already to be creeping over all that made life beautiful to Arnold. He had struggled to be brave, and to bear the first great sorrow that had fallen upon him, as a good man should; but as he lifted his eyes to the light, the prospect darkened, and as he stretched out his hand to gather the remaining hopes that were budding in the future, fate seized and dragged him down, and surrounded him with shadows deeper and darker than ever. *Before*, he had only the crushing weight of disappointment to bear—that was bitter enough. *Now*, he had the cross of shame to carry, and that weighed him down.

It was no use for him to attempt to disguise the truth from himself. He was suspected of murder. It was true the suspicion might rest upon him only for a few hours, but he felt that it would leave its mark behind. He was tainted with the seeming guilt, though not stained with the crime.

He could never forget the mass of threatening, angry faces that frowned upon him on the platform he had just left. He sighed as he thought of the dark, sombre figure he had last seen, and the soft, low voice he had heard at the Rouen station. The words she uttered were branded on his memory—"I hope it will be calm, for I so dread the sea." Could she have had a foreboding of her fate? Death must have stood, like an invisible spectre, by her side, and whispered that he was there, ready to conduct her on her journey. He shuddered as he thought of the ghastly glare of the dead woman's eyes, which seemed to be fixed on *him* when she lay stiffened in death. He fancied he could see them still, in the dim gray morning light, as though they had left an impression in the air that would never fade away, but would follow him, a haunting memory, for ever. Already it seemed as though ages had passed since he left Rouen, and taken that fatal journey in company with the dead.

The morning light broke slowly and softly over

the city of Paris, chasing away the gloomy night shadows that lingered among the graceful colonnades, and shrouded the old churches in a soft gray mist. The day dawn mingled mysteriously with the dim twilight shadows, until they had all departed, and the brightest and most elegant city in the world, with its bristling spires, grand palaces, and host of quaint architectural glories, stood out a mass of monumental beauty, in the broad daylight.

Arnold could scarcely realize the fact that he was driving through the streets in the temporary custody, at least, of an officer of police. It was still some hours before the Préfet would enter upon the duties of his office, and Arnold waited in a state of feverish excitement until the time arrived for him to appear before him. Meanwhile he was left alone in a gloomy, desolate-looking place, with barred windows and bare stone floor, roughened and worn by the tread of many feet. He almost fancied he could trace the steps of guilty agony upon the ground, and hear the sighs

of criminals mingling with the cold damp air, which seemed impregnated with the breath of crime. He felt stifled; he could hardly breathe, and but for very shame could have sunk upon the hard stone bench and wept aloud. He heard the murmuring of voices outside, and once the door opened, and a strange face looked in upon him. No doubt M. Herchel had been discussing the crime with his associates, and they were tempted to look in and behold the hero of the awful tragedy. His nervous excitement increased till it culminated in a state of maddening impatience. Presently the door opened and M. Herchel informed him that the Préfet was ready to commence his examination.

It is needless to enter into the details of what took place before the Préfet. Nothing further could be elicited from Arnold than the simple story which he had already told to M. Herchel. He underwent a very strict cross-examination, and was unwavering and straightforward in all his replies. M. Herchel received private instructions from the Préfet. Arnold was told all that it con-

cerned him to know, namely, that M. Herchel was to accompany him at once to Rouen in search of Dr. La Belle, who was to return with them without delay to Paris.

CHAPTER XIV.

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.

WHILE Arnold was undergoing his painful trial in Paris, things were looking brighter in London. Mrs. Elmore seemed to grow more cheerful after her son's departure. She trusted that change of air and scene would draw his thoughts away from his bitter disappointment, and that time at last would reconcile him to his loss. Loss?—she sometimes wondered if he had really lost! There might be hope for him still. Who could tell? Time and chance might bring about some unexpected event, that would entirely alter the aspect of affairs. The sun might shine out once

more from behind the dark cloud that now obscured his life; and she tried with her mind's eye to penetrate the darkness and catch a glimpse of the silver lining. It was true her dear son Arnold was away, and had carried with him a heart heavy with disappointment and regret; but he also carried with him Maude's heartfelt sympathy, and warm sisterly affection stretched to its utmost bounds. The accepted and the rejected were both far away. The absence of St. Pierre was a great relief to Mrs. Elmore. His presence and his attention to Maude had been a continual source of irritation to her, even before his object had been declared; now her invincible antipathy was increased ten-fold. But happily his own affairs had called him to his own country; and from the bottom of her heart Mrs. Elmore prayed that he might never return. She remembered the old adage, "There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," and she would have been inclined to judge kindly of any accident that dashed from St. Pierre's lips the cup her son was thirsting to

taste. Indeed, through Mrs. Elmore's brain there ran a troubled stream of hopes and fears, of possible and impossible things, that harassed her continually. She was by no means charitable in her thoughts and wishes, where St. Pierre was concerned.

Luckily, however, she had not leisure to occupy herself solely with her son's affairs; she had other demands on her time and attention. She was hourly expecting Mr. Chester's return to London, accompanied by her sister, and was actively engaged in making preparations to receive her. Maude delightedly joined in the task; she flitted hither and thither about the house like a benevolent fairy gathering together all good gifts to bestow on the forlorn stranger. She ransacked her room for its choicest treasures, resolved that the prettiest ornaments, the sweetest flowers, and the most amusing books should be transferred to Madame Gautier's room. Mrs. Elmore was deeply gratified to see Maude enter so zealously into her plans, so sympathetically into her feelings. She talked of her sister freely, and

told Maude more and more of her sad history every hour. She dived back into bygone years, when they were both girls together; the memory of old times seemed to cast a charmed spell over her. Her thoughtful eyes brightened as she told Maude anecdotes of her own and her sister's youth. The light of other days illumined her face; she seemed to live over again the scenes she so well remembered and so vividly painted.

She took Maude up to her dressing-room, and unlocked her sanctuary, where she kept the treasured relics of the past. It was an old-fashioned bureau, which Maude remembered well. Often, when she was a child, she had seen Mrs. Elmore sit down before it, open some of its tiny drawers, or thrust her hand into one of its mysterious recesses ("pigeon-holes" she used to call them), and draw forth something which brought tears into her eyes and made her sad for the rest of the day. As Maude grew older she had always held the bureau in great respect: she knew that it held the ashes of all that was

dead and sacred in Mrs. Elmore's past life; and a strange quaint medley she had garnered up. Maude peered over her shoulder now almost as curiously as she had done years ago. Mrs. Elmore was searching for her sister's portrait; it seemed to be hidden in some out-of-the-way corner, where it could not be found, Mrs. Elmore took out one thing after another; on some she uttered a brief comment, on others a brief sigh.

Maude thought some of the articles too trivial to be guarded with such zealous care; but she had never been a wife, and did not know what sweet associations were attached to trifling things, making them dear to the widow's heart. She had no son, and could not understand the holy memories that cling incense-like round the boy's first letter home; with what mute eloquence the crooked letters and ill-phrased words spoke still to the mother's heart. It was a melancholy task, that searching among the relics of the past. Occasionally Mrs. Elmore lighted on something that called a loving smile to her lips. Many

were the small mementoes she had treasured of her boy's childhood. There was his first tiny red shoe, the coral that cut his teeth, and some dilapidated playthings, among them a broken humming-top; she took it out.

"A pleasant story hangs on this," she said; "I will tell it you some day, Maude. It was through this broken top I first heard my boy's nature speak. He had a noble heart always, my dear Arnold!" She paused a moment, and then added solemnly, "If he were wandering at the other end of the world, or if he were dead and in his grave, Maude, he would be with me still. These mute things, which you might perhaps smile at, bring him back to me again; not as a man sorrowing for a woman's love, rich in wisdom, struggling for the world's fame and honours, but as a child, fresh, innocent, and pure, when I, his mother, was all the world to him, when he wished for nothing but what my love could grant him, when he ran to my arms for shelter from all frowns, all sorrows. If he were dumb for ever, I could

hear him speak again—not as a bearded man, but with his pretty lisping speech, as he used to prattle at my knee—God bless him !”

Mrs. Elmore was silent ; her busy hands desisted from their work, and lay listlessly in her lap. Maude too was silent—indeed she did not know what to say ; she felt they were treading on dangerous ground ; she was afraid that any word of hers might call forth unavailing regrets or tender reproaches ; and those she could not bear. She made no answer, but gently stooped forward and kissed her old friend with warm, sympathetic love.

Maude could understand now the value of the small treasures she had before wondered at. Mrs. Elmore soon recovered herself, and renewed her search. Presently she drew forth what she had been looking for—a morocco case, containing an exquisite miniature painting of a girl of eighteen or twenty. She was a fair, fragile-looking creature, apparently little calculated to endure the world’s rough usage ; the soft, wide-open eyes seemed to appeal

to the heart for protection and support. There were no signs of a passionate nature, no play of vivacious spirits in the face; its expression was gentle, earnest, and serené. She looked like one of those tender loving women who are nothing in themselves, but who need to be gathered in a man's strong arms, and sheltered in his brave heart, there to flourish, perfuming his life with graceful affections, while strengthening her own.

"How sweet and good she looks!" said Maude, looking at the portrait admiringly.

"Her looks do not do her justice," replied Mrs. Elmore. "Ah, Maude, no good will ever come of a girl's marrying a foreigner. When I remember how my sister's life has been blighted, I could almost wish——"

"No!" exclaimed Maude, laying her hand gently on Mrs. Elmore's lips: "you will wish no evil. One foreigner may have been the bane of her life, but another will be the blessing of mine. Believe it, auntie dear, believe it! What

would this world be if all men were tainted by the sin of one? You must get over your prejudices for my sake, and I will love *her*”—pointing to the portrait—“for yours. I quite long to see her. Can she arrive to-day, do you think?”

“Possibly she may; you know Mr. Chester is to bring her over; and if they are not delayed by business matters in Paris, I certainly think they ought to arrive to-day.”

“Hark!” exclaimed Maude: “that was a knock at the door! I am sure I hear Mr. Chester’s voice below and his footstep. Come, quick!”

Mrs. Elmore hastily closed the bureau, and they hurried down-stairs together. They found Mr. Chester in the drawing-room, but he was alone. The expression of his face at once subdued Mrs. Elmore’s momentary alarm. She knew that, if anything very serious had occurred, he would not have come forward to greet her with his usual genial, cheerful smile.

“I am glad to see you back again,” said Mrs. Elmore, as she returned his greeting; “but

where is my sister? Why is she not with you?"

"She will be here by-and-by—that is, in the course of a day or two; but she will come in much better company than mine."

"In whose company? What do you mean? I do not understand you," exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, breathlessly.

"Well," he answered, "I am not surprised at that, for at first I found the matter very difficult to understand myself. I think you will be very much surprised, and at the same time pleased to receive her companion."

"But who is her companion?" asked Mrs. Elmore. "Not Arnold, surely?" she added, hastily. "Can chance have thrown them together? You know he is in France."

"No, not Arnold—her husband," replied Mr. Chester.

"You astound me!" exclaimed Mrs. Elmore. "Her husband?" Then, seeing that he cast a doubtful glance on Maude, as though he hesitated

to speak before her, Mrs. Elmore added, "Oh, you can speak freely before Maude: she knows everything. Come, sit down: I will ask you no more questions, but will be content to listen to you; for I am sure you must have a strange story to tell. Have you seen M. Gautier?"

"I have, and find him a most elegant and accomplished gentleman—one of the most agreeable companions I have ever met with."

"Begin at the beginning, please," said Mrs. Elmore, rather impatiently, as though she did not wish to listen to the praises of M. Gautier; "I want to know everything—how you met my sister, what she said, and how and why you parted with her. Come, tell me all."

Thus entreated, Mr. Chester related his adventures, from his arrival in Paris to the moment he quitted. Mrs. Elmore hung upon every sentence he uttered, as though she hoped to extract more meaning than his words expressed. In spite of her grave face, Maude laughed heartily at the idea of Mr. Chester's moral character being attacked

by Madame Hauberdin; but when he came to his unexpected meeting with M. and Madame Gautier in the railway-train, both Maude and Mrs. Elmore listened with breathless attention. Strange and varied expressions swept across Mrs. Elmore's face: compassionate love and pity moistened her eyes as Mr. Chester repeated Madame Gautier's tender messages, and endeavoured to convey an idea of her look and manner as she uttered them; but when he came to M. Gautier's insinuation respecting the state of his wife's mind, Mrs. Elmore's face expressed indignant scorn and disbelief, but she did not interrupt him. Throughout Mr. Chester's whole narration it was evident to see that he was deeply impressed in M. Gautier's favour. He spoke of him with a warmth that annoyed Mrs. Elmore; for where she once believed there was darkness she was resolved to see no light.

When Mr. Chester ended, she said, emphatically, "I do not believe one word that M. Gautier has uttered about my poor sister. I am more anxious

than ever now to have her under my own roof; here, please God, his cruel authority and injustice cannot reach her."

"But, my dear Mrs. Elmore, you must admit that M. Gautier has a show of right on his side. Fair play is a jewel," said Mr. Chester, a little excitedly; "and you must own that Madame Gautier's conduct has been strange, to say the least of it. In her letter to me she seemed in a state bordering on distraction. She summons me to Paris. I obey her. She fails to keep her appointment, and two hours afterwards I find her travelling on the best possible terms with the very man from whom she desired to fly! Of course, if the poor lady's mind is a little wrong, all this, ay, and many other things which have puzzled us for years, may be easily accounted for; indeed, from my own observation, I should take M. Gautier's version to be the true one."

"I should not," replied Mrs. Elmore. "I have no difficulty in accounting for all that seems so strange to you. My poor sister's spirit may have

been coerced into that state of unnatural calm in which you say you found her——”

“ Well,” said Mr. Chester, “ I believe a woman’s spirit might be coerced into submission, but I doubt if her tongue could ever be charmed into silence if she thought she was wronged ; she would speak, if she died for it.”

The more they conversed upon the matter, the more they were at issue ; they could not agree on a single point. Mr. Chester grew slightly irritated at the idea of his penetration being called in question ; Mrs. Elmore insisted that he had been deceived by appearances. Before he took his leave he expressed his regret that he should not, for some time, be able to renew his acquaintance with M. Gautier. “ I am not feeling very well,” he said ; “ I don’t think that nasty trip across the Channel has done me any good : it has stirred up my bile and made me irritable. I know very well, if I don’t get a thorough change, and a breath of fresh air, I shall have another attack of that horrid sciatica.”

"Why didn't you go on to Switzerland?" said Maude.

"I hate foreign countries; I like to explore my own," replied Mr. Chester. "I shall go and bury myself for a month among the Welsh mountains, or perhaps run over the Highlands, where not a soul shall know my whereabouts, and where not even the name of business shall reach me."

So saying Mr. Chester arose to go. Mrs. Elmore was by no means sorry when he took his departure; his account of his visit to Paris had vexed her more than she chose to express. She waited in a state of nervous excitement her sister's expected arrival. Mr. Chester had scarcely been gone an hour, when the postman brought a letter from Arnold: it was that which he had written on his first arrival at Rouen, and its contents cheered and gladdened his mother's heart, and drew her thoughts away from the anxious and perplexing fears that agitated her mind on her sister's account.

In the evening of that same day, as Mrs. Elmore and Maude sat chatting over the tea-table, they heard, amidst the rattling roar of carriages dashing to and fro, a vehicle drive up to the door with a dead rumbling sound; it stopped—the bell rang—Mrs. Elmore sprang from her seat, pressed her hand upon her heart, as though to still its beating.

“My sister! my dear sister!” she exclaimed, and flew from the room. Maude, from a feeling of delicacy, hesitated whether she should follow her. She had scarcely time for a moment’s deliberation, when a sharp, ringing cry pierced her ears like a knife; she rushed like lightning down the stairs, and saw Mrs. Elmore standing with her hands upraised, shudderingly, and an expression of speechless horror upon her face. Maude looked beyond. There, in the hall, stood the servants, in solemn parley with four men, who had entered the house, bearing a large black coffin on their shoulders. The dark hearse loomed on her sight through the open door. There

had been a death at the next house, and the men had brought that ominous burthen by mistake to Mrs. Elmore's door. In hurrying forward to meet, as she believed, her sister, she had rushed direct upon a coffin.

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